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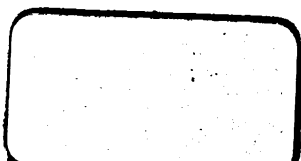
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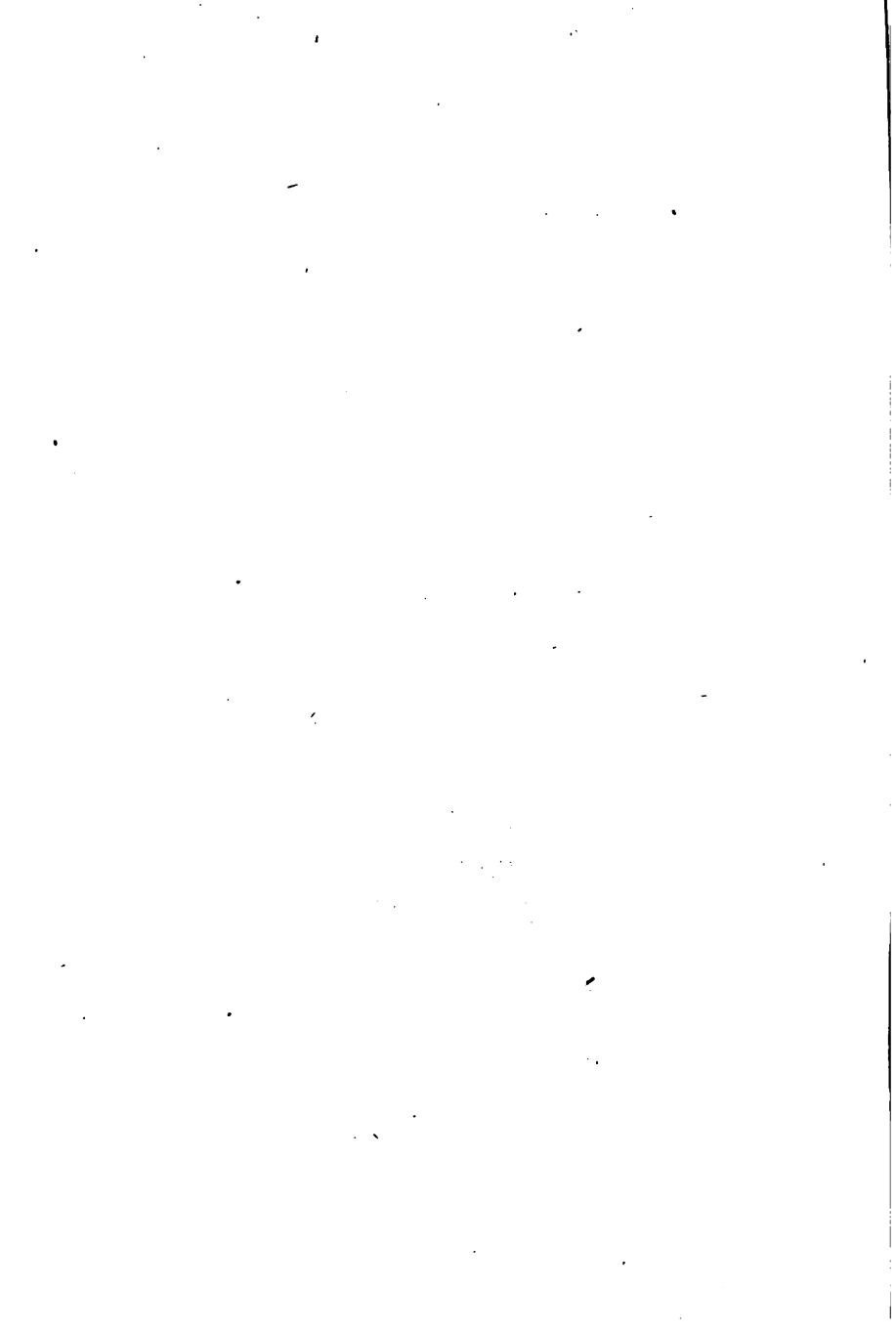
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AN AUTHOR'S STORY,

AND

OTHER TALES.

BY

EMILY FOSTER.



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TALES.



AN AUTHOR'S STORY;

OR,

THE EVENTS OF A DAY.

NO, I'm not an author, that is, I do not write for my living in the sense of writing books or articles for newspapers; though, in another way, I do write for my living, having to use the pen all day long in a certain government office, which, for good reasons, I shall not mention by name; and hard and monotonous as is this drudgery, yet I often feel thankful I have that to depend on rather than having to rely solely on the labours of my brain; though, I grant, those labours often afford me a pleasant relaxation from the toils and cares of ordinary life.

Having a wife and four children entirely dependent on my exertions, it is also a source of gratification to me that I am able, by means of my humble literary efforts, to add to the resources of a somewhat slender income.

I do not aspire to the distinction of having complete volumes published, bearing on their title-page, 'By J. Wood.' No; my highest efforts simply amount to contributing a serial tale occasionally to the *Cosmopolitan Miscellany*, which, for the sake of abbreviation, we always call the *Cos. Mis.*

Being occupied on one of these tales entitled 'The Lover's Stratagem; or, The Bandit's Revenge,' and, having a day's holiday, I thought I would devote my leisure to the further completion of my story, and it is with the view of telling how I succeeded that I have penned the following pages.

For this purpose I retired to what is called my study, a small room upstairs at the back of our modest dwelling, where I keep my few books, my papers, and writing materials, and sat down with the full determination of proceeding vigorously with my composition, having arrived at an interesting portion of the fifth chapter.

As I consider this story of mine rather clever, and decidedly the best I have yet produced, and

I trust I may not be thought very egotistical for saying so, I shall give an outline of it, as I feel sure you cannot fail to be interested in its contents,

As the *Cos. Mis.* is supposed to contain stories of all nations, I have laid the scene of mine in Spain. I had thought of Germany; but then I came to the conclusion that so many people know Germany in these days, and it is always better to write about a place persons don't know much about, as then they can't tell whether you are right or wrong, and are unable to contradict you; besides it was necessary for the development of my plot that the scene should be laid in a Catholic country. But to proceed.

Don Carlos is in love with Doña Idonia, who is, of course, extremely beautiful.

It is wonderful how common very beautiful people seem in books, and how rarely they are seen in real life. It would not be thought correct in the *Cos. Mis.* if your heroine was not a perfect marvel of all that is lovely.

Doña Idonia is the only child of Don Pedro and Doña Estella Di Montmorenci. They forbid the union of their daughter with Don Carlos, he being a Protestant, while they are staunch Catholics.

It is always proper in your stories to make the parents and children violently opposed on

the subject of love and marriage, though I have great doubts about this being the case in real life. I really think there is great unanimity in a family about the children getting what is called 'settled in life,' more especially in the case of daughters, at least I know when I married my Maria, now about ten years ago, so far from any obstacle being raised to our union, it is my firm belief that every one of her relations did their very best to further it. But, be that as it may, it adds greatly to the easy construction of your plot to make parents or guardians completely opposed to the lovers of your story. But to proceed.

Don Gusman, who is in reality the Bandit, but is thought to be an Hidalgo, also wishes to marry Doña Idonia, who, however, looks upon him with fear and hatred.

Don Miguel, who is married to a Doña Isabella, a cousin of Doña Idonia, is aware of Don Gusman's true character, having been captured by him; and only released by an immense ransom and his solemn oath never to betray him.

Was the oath binding under the circumstance in which it was given?

I can't say, but I make Don Miguel think it was.

Don Gusman finds out the lovers have

secret meetings, and betrays this to the mother, Doña Estella, who, under the advice of the Priest Father Ludovico, has her daughter suddenly and secretly conveyed to a convent.'

It has been said, at the bottom of every mischief is a woman, but I should be inclined to say at the bottom of many an evil deed is a priest.

Don Carlos is now apprehended by the Inquisition.

Of course I don't know anything about the Inquisition or its proceedings, never having been there, nor had the slightest acquaintance with its doings, but then I take it, neither have my readers, who have, probably like myself, obtained what little they know about it, or think they know about it, from books, therefore I feel quite at liberty to draw on my imagination here without the slightest fear of being contradicted or considered wrong.

Don Gusman and his band having committed greater depredations than usual, the government are on their track, though it is not yet discovered that Gusman the Bandit, and Don Gusman the supposed Hidalgo, are one and the same person.

He, thinking that Don Miguel has in some way broken his oath, determines to be revenged on him, and consequently pursues him, or has him pursued with that determination.

Finding out that all Don Miguel's hopes are centred in his little son, he resolves to take his revenge by causing his death ; he, therefore, administers a poison secretly to the child in some sweetmeats.

I think this is a fine point, having a poison given to the child in some sweetmeats, and I dare say the greedy little hog ate them all up directly they were given to him.

Janetta, a servant belonging to Don Pedro, guesses the nature of the poison, and an antidote is administered, so that the child, much to Don Gusman's surprise, recovers.

It would never have done to let him be triumphant in destroying the child.

The servant Janetta is much attached to her young mistress Doña Idonia, and endeavours to find out what has become of her.

It appears to be the correct thing in stories, and especially those which are laid in foreign lands, to make the servant perfectly willing to sacrifice not only his or her interests, but even, if necessary, his or her life, in the service of master or mistress. Now I don't know how it may be abroad, but here in England, as far as my experience goes, I have never found that servants are willing to forego the slightest thing in favour of their employers ; though certainly no very extraordinary occurrence has

happened in my life necessitating any great sacrifice or devotion from those who have been from time to time employed by me ; nevertheless, if I may presume to judge from trifles that have come under my notice, I should not have much to expect if real or great sacrifices had to be made for my benefit by those who have been or are now in a subordinate position in my household. But to proceed with my story.

Don Carlos, who has endured a few of the lesser horrors of the Inquisition, now makes his escape by the assistance of one of the ' Familiars.'

I may just remark here that I think this part of my tale verges on the improbable ; however, that won't much matter for the *Cos. Mis.*, and I have endeavoured to give it an air of probability by saying that Don Carlos had at his own risk saved the life of this ' Familiar ' some time previously by having rescued him from being run over by a runaway horse, when accidentally passing him in the streets of Granada.

I don't think I should put myself out of the way to save a crafty Jesuit, or even a priest, considering that one less in the world would be no great loss ; but it will serve to point a moral to my tale that even to serve one who seems your enemy may turn to your advantage some time or other.

This 'Familiar,' out of gratitude, connives at the escape of Don Carlos, furnishing him with a disguise in the dress of a 'Familiar,' and giving him the pass-word, so that he finds no difficulty in quitting the Inquisition.

Of course not!

He in this disguise endeavours to trace out the destination of Doña Idonia, for he had heard before his own capture that she was no longer with her parents.

In this search he is greatly aided by Janetta, to whom he has secretly discovered himself, and who believes she has overheard Doña Estella mention the place to which her daughter has been taken.

The scene now changes to a convent, where Doña Idonia is confined.

Here I intend to give a glimpse of convent life, though, being a man, I have not, of course, any personal acquaintance with the interior of convents; but I do not propose delineating life there as such a calm, peaceful existence, which is, I believe, the orthodox way. No, I don't believe when a parcel of women are shut up together that they are so very gentle and peaceful.

Not if I may judge by their behaviour in the world from an instance I saw with my own eyes.

Two of the 'Sisters,' as they are called, were at a well-known London railway station, and one seemed to be accusing the other of leaving her everything to do—by the way that is not an uncommon occurrence with worldly people—this accusation appeared to produce a most violent quarrel, and I give you my word of honour that no two market-women could have seemed more enraged than were these two sweet Sisters of Mercy.

Now, if this is their behaviour in public, what must it be in private?

Is it not likely, more especially with those who are complete prisoners, that they make up by the freedom of their tongues for their loss of liberty in other respects? Pardon me this long digression from my tale, which shall now be continued.

Doña Idonia is not only grieved at the separation from her lover, but is dispirited and disgusted by what she sees going on daily at the convent of Santa Maria, and which proves very different from what she imagined life at a convent would be, and a deep melancholy is fast growing upon her, when it is broken by a visit from Janetta, who has managed to obtain an interview, and who contrives, just before she leaves, to press a small note into her hand unperceived by the old nun by whom

Doña Idonia is accompanied. As soon as a favourable opportunity occurs, she reads this very small but important paper, which contains these words :—

‘ Be in the convent garden, close to the south wall, to-morrow, at the hour of midnight. All is well.’

It is all very well to suggest this, and to carry it out in imagination, but I scarcely think it would be found possible to do so in real life, as I have heard escape from a convent is almost more difficult than escape from a prison ; but the improbability will pass in the story perhaps unnoticed.

When Doña Idonia has read this paper, she conceals it in her bosom, and with difficulty assumes her now usual sad and languid expression.

However, no suspicion is excited in those around her, and at the appointed hour Doña Idonia is in the convent garden waiting anxiously for what is to occur.

A rope-ladder is now thrown over the wall by means of a lasso, and a voice says, ‘ Mount quickly.’ So Doña Idonia mounts the wall, and descends safely on the other side, but on reaching the ground and looking around, she thinks she has been betrayed, for, to her horror, she finds herself in the presence of a ‘ Familiar’ of the Inquisition.

I have not the least idea whether the escape just described would be possible or not, but it answers my purpose to suppose it would ; and, fortunately for me, the readers of the *Cos. Mis.* are not over critical—indeed, a little savour of the improbable is rather relished than otherwise.

In the meantime, Don Gusman is being so closely pursued by the government, that he is almost in despair, yet he still cherishes the idea of being revenged on Don Miguel.

Being now less mindful of secrecy, he one day pursues Don Miguel into his house, follows him into a room where Don Miguel's child is sleeping, draws out a stiletto, and is about to stab the unconscious boy before the startled and agonised father can prevent it, when the mother, Doña Isabella, who had, unperceived, seen him enter, snatches up a bottle of vitriol, which happened to be close at hand, and dashes it in the wretched man's face.

I have mentioned vitriol here, because it is the only thing that has occurred to me ; but I should like to have something with a more poetical and high-sounding name. Perhaps I shall be able to think of the name of some wash or poison with a more euphonious title that will equally answer my purpose. I have a friend a chemist. I think I will ask him ; most likely

he will be able to tell me of some chemical with a fine name, that I may substitute for vitriol, in the scene of Don Gusman's attempt on Don Miguel's child.

With a howl of pain and rage Don Gusman now drops the stiletto, and the gendarmes, who have discovered him through the betrayal of one of his own band, enter and claim him as their prisoner, and he is quickly led off to one of the Spanish dungeons, and soon perishes on the scaffold.

There is nothing like making him die miserably, for getting rid of the villain of your piece.

The story now returns to Doña Idonia, who finds that instead of the dreaded 'Familiar' of the Inquisition, it is her lover, Don Carlos, in that disguise; and it was her agitation in escaping from the convent that prevented her immediately recognising his voice.

Once away from the convent and its neighbourhood, he throws off this disguise, having his own proper costume underneath.

Janetta now appears with what is needful to transform Doña Idonia from the nun into the ordinary Spanish lady.

I think the presence and aid of the servant come in here very well.

They now proceed to France, where Doña Idonia and Don Carlos are immediately married

by a Protestant clergyman, Doña Idonia having completely abjured Roman Catholicism.

And I don't think this is to be wondered at, when it is considered what she had endured from that beautiful religion.

When Don Pedro hears of his daughter's union with a heretic, his rage and grief are so great that he has a fit and dies.

Doña Estella then immediately retires to a convent, where she spends the rest of her days.

It is to be hoped the old lady found herself more comfortable than Idonia did. On second thoughts, I think it would only be poetical justice to hint that she was visited with much compunction for the manner in which she had behaved to her daughter.

Having thus got rid of the parents, I make Doña Idonia accede to the request of her husband, that they should go and reside in England. No place like England, if people want to enjoy their liberty and be comfortable.

I shall put that in the *Cos. Mis.*, it will sound patriotic, and it is only right to uphold one's own country.

Janetta, who has also become a Protestant, accompanies them to England, and there they all live very happily for the remainder of their lives.

This appears to me to form a good con-

clusion to my story, which, when elaborated by detail, will, I think, prove a great success; and I felt anxious on the day in question to push on with it as much as possible, for, I will not deny it, the money that I expect to receive for this tale will be very acceptable just now.

On the day in question I sat down, drew a fresh quire of paper towards me, and had written satisfactorily for half-an-hour, when I had a very slight interruption by my wife coming in, saying she wanted to write a couple of letters, and the children were making such a noise down stairs she could not collect her thoughts, and had come into my study that she might be quiet.

I gave a grunt of assent, for I was just then intent on a secret interview between the lovers of my story, and was wondering how I could make Don Gusman see them without betraying his presence.

I was writing—‘The moon seemed to be shining down lovingly on those two, whose deep attachment to each other was to entail so much suffering to both’—when I caught the sound of my wife’s voice, saying,—

‘Do tell me, John, whether there is one “d” or two in additional,—I have asked you twice?’

For when writing, certain words always seem to puzzle Mrs. Wood, and to this day I don’t

believe she knows whether quarrelled has one 'l' in it or two, or whether niece is spelt *niece* or *neice*.

I give the required information, and we both write on for a time—I have made up my mind that Don Gusman shall be concealed from view by means of a projection in a building near, and am describing his sardonic satisfaction at his discovery of the lovers, when I am again appealed to by my wife as to what the day of the month is.

I reply rather hastily 'it is the eighth,' and then continue to write,—

'The moon, which had been temporarily under a cloud, now shone more transcendently than before, and its beams cast into deeper shadow the place where Don Gusman was concealed.

'Nothing around transpired to indicate that the terrible bandit was so close at hand, or indeed to cause suspicion that any one was near.

'A serene peace seemed to rest upon the scene, only broken by—'

'Is piece spelt *pei* or *pie*?' This, of course, is from my wife, but I take no notice, and continue—'only broken by the soft splash of a fountain, and the low sweet tones—'

'It's very unkind, John, you won't tell me how to spell piece.'

I reply somewhat impatiently, for I feel as if my peace was being broken in upon,—that,

it is spelt p-e-a-c-e, to which Maria responds it is not that peace she wants. I feel I do, but merely spell the required word, adding at the same time in an irritable tone, for my patience is almost exhausted, that she had better get a dictionary ; and my wife answers that I am dreadfully cross this morning, and that I care neither for her nor the children when I get to that writing—this remark rouses me, and we have one of those little matrimonial differences of opinion that will sometimes occur even with people who are really attached to each other.

I don't remember precisely what we said on the occasion. Nothing very sensible, I dare say ; but I recollect it ended in my wife quitting the room and slamming the door.

To tell the truth, I did not altogether regret her absence, though it was some minutes before I could resume the train of thought from which I had been so abruptly disturbed.

I now pursued my writing for a short time, when Freddy and Jack, my two little boys, of the ages of five and six, peeped into the room, asking whether they may be with papa a little while, as mamma is gone out.

I reply a little absently in the affirmative.

Being healthy, active children, they soon become too noisy for me to go on comfortably

with my composition, and I desired them rather sternly to be still. Then, remembering an anecdote I had read of how a little boy was kept still in his father's study by the pretence he was a little dog, I tell my two boys they must fancy themselves little dogs, and lie still. This they do for a time, and I continue with my chapter, in which a second interview takes place with the lovers, and Don Gusman, much to their surprise and terror, discovers himself.

Although I am absorbed in the triumph of Don Gusman at the discomfiture of Doña Idonia and Don Carlos (and I cause their dread to be the greater from Don Carlos having, during this interview, entreated Doña Idonia to become a Protestant)—I repeat, although I am absorbed in this, I cannot avoid hearing, in an absent sort of way, two little voices near me. Jack says to Freddy,—

‘I am tired of being a little dog, ain't you?’ To which the other responds,—‘Yes; let's do something else. Only pa says we mustn't 'sturb him.’

Quiet now reigns for a little while, when I am startled by the fall of a chair, and a cry from Jack, who has tumbled off it. I rise and restore Jack and the chair to their normal position, but am first horrified and then

vexed to find the children have been turning over and disarranging all my papers. I become angry, and Freddy's tears are now added to those of Jack ; but, on my threatening to turn them both out of the room, they promise to be good, and plead so earnestly to stay with me, that I am unable to refuse them.

Again I return to my writing, and I am depicting Don Gusman's interview with Doña Estella, in which he betrays how her daughter is secretly engaged to Don Carlos. In this scene I have made the priest present saying— 'that the pale, calm face of Father Ludovico betrayed nothing of the inward chuckle with which he heard those words uttered by Don Gusman— words which bore such a fearful import to the two principal personages of our tale.'

When, by some intuition, I became aware the children have become very quiet for some time—so quiet that it may be taken for granted they are in some mischief—I rise hastily, and behold that which conveys 'a fearful import' to me, for Freddy is smeared with red ink, while Jack is even in a worse plight with black—the one having been endeavouring to colour with red ink engravings of a book, and the other drawing rude outlines of what he calls 'donteys' on the paper of the room.

Having taken in at a glance the mischief the children have done, I become very wrathful, snatch book and pens out of their hands, and with a good shake and a slap turn them summarily out of the room, and by their retreating cries I know they have gone down to confide their troubles to the youthful Eliza, our one domestic for the present, the other and more experienced servant having been dismissed in a hurry, in consequence of a leaning to something stronger than water, and irregular hours.

I have just become composed enough to take up the thread of my story, when the said Eliza pops her head into the room, and says,—‘Please, sir, there’s a lady wants to see you.’

‘What is her name?’ I reply, finishing the sentence I am writing, which runs thus :—

‘Give her to the Church, Doña Estella—Give her to the Church. The Holy Mother will find means to save her child from union with a cursed heretic.’

‘It is a Miss Hardy, sir, and she particularly wishes to see you.’

I have not the least idea who Miss Hardy is, or what she has come for, not having the most remote acquaintance with her; however, I go down, and, much to my annoyance, I find it is nothing but a begging petition—this

Miss Hardy wanting me to contribute something to some bazaar for the 'Restoration of Ancient Missals.' I politely decline to do anything of the kind, and the lady, an elderly spinster, who, I soon find, is a Ritualist, then demands in a suave tone, whether I will not give something to some orphanage with an outlandish name. Of course, a convent in disguise. I again decline still more positively, and bow the lady out, thinking, as I close the door upon her, Doña Estella may give up her daughter to the Church; but hang me if a sixpence of my hard-earned money ever goes to the same purpose.

I then betake myself to my study, and resume my tale, and remained sufficiently long to write how Doña Idonia, when rambling one day on the confines of her father's domain, is suddenly seized by two men in masks, muffled to stifle her cries, and conveyed away. These men are some of Don Gusman's band, he having designed to carry off the lady, but the intention is frustrated by the emissaries of Father Ludovico, who has secretly been informed of this intended treachery of Don Gusman. An altercation ensues, and the Church becomes the victor, carrying off the prize, and when Doña Idonia is released, she finds herself within the walls of a convent. I here broke

off my chapter, and commenced a fresh one, in which the machinations proceed against Don Carlos. I was stating how Father Ludovico was conversing in low tones with two of the 'Familiars' of the Inquisition, when I thought I beheld one of them, for a very black face stood before me, but it was only Eliza, who had rushed in, and who said, in almost breathless tones, —

'Please come down, sir, I've upset the frying-pan, and the kitchen chimney is on fire.'

At these words I, of course, proceed downstairs with the utmost speed, there to find Eliza's words too true. However, knowing what to do, and having presence of mind to do it, I eventually got the fire under, and, although it was all through that stupid girl's carelessness that the fire happened, yet I must say she aided me very well to put it out. My wife now returned, and I, seeing that all danger was past, gladly made my escape up-stairs; but, as I was now almost as black as a 'Familiar,' I was compelled to attend to the duties of the toilet, and when I once more returned to my study, I felt slightly fatigued with my unwonted exertions, so I indulged myself with reading over what I had already written, and was so pleased with it that my slight fatigue at once disappeared, and I set to work with renewed vigour,

and described how Don Carlos was seized and taken to the Inquisition, and how Janetta, the faithful servant of Doña Idonia, who was terribly grieved at the loss of her beloved mistress, hears through a servant of the priest that she has been conveyed to a convent, and that Don Carlos has been apprehended as a heretic by the Inquisition. On hearing this, Janetta utters a fearful scream, and falls down in a fainting fit.

Was there a scream and a fall? Or was it only the effects of my imagination, being so intent on my tale? No, it was clearly no fancy, for I could now hear voices that I knew mingled with the cries and sobs of my eldest child Mary, who is more than eight years old, and on descending, found her with a large bruise and swelling on her forehead, she having fallen down-stairs over a broom that careless Eliza had left in the way. After brown paper and vinegar had been put to the child's forehead, and I had soothed her fright, dinner, which had been somewhat delayed by the aforesaid Eliza's carelessness in upsetting the frying-pan, was now ready. Having partaken of that meal, I once more ascended to my study, hoping, as I had so many interruptions in the morning, to meet with better success during the remainder of the day.

I now commenced that part of my story where Don Gusman and his band are being tracked by the government, and had written several pages satisfactorily, when my wife entered the room with rather a perturbed face, saying,—

‘Oh, John! Here is that tax-collector called again. He has already been here two or three times, and was quite rude to me the last time he came. I do wish you would see him.’

I felt as if I were being pursued by the government; for, truth to say, with all our endeavours to be economical, several circumstances had combined lately to throw us a little behind, and I had not the money by me necessary to meet the present demand, though I knew I should have it in a few days.

Much as I disliked seeing Mr. Hunt, the collector, under this aspect of affairs, I felt I could do no less than accede to my wife's request, so went down with the best grace I could.

I confess the interview was not altogether a pleasant one; indeed, Mr. Hunt said that he only consented to the extra delay on account of my having always paid previously, but that he should not call again, and that if the money were not sent at the time I had specified, he should be compelled to take legal proceedings

against me. I felt so disturbed and annoyed by this call of Mr. Hunt's, that it was some little time before I could again apply myself to the composition of my tale ; but then the thought of the pecuniary compensation I should get when it was completed nerved me to fresh efforts, and, such is the absorbing nature of writing, that, half-an-hour afterwards, I had almost forgotten the visit of the collector, and the annoyance it had occasioned me.

I now wrote on, introducing more prominently Don Miguel and Doña Isabella into my story, making her only second in beauty to Doña Idonia—also their child, whom I make a prodigy of loveliness and precocity.

By-the-bye, I don't think children in real life are a bit like those depicted in books, at least I know mine are not. I had got to the point where they are assembled at the castle of Don Pedro, where Don Gusman 'beholds for the first time the pretty and engaging boy,' and where he begins to meditate vengeance against Don Miguel for having, as he thinks, broken his oath—when to my vexation my wife again entered with the information that Miss Crossley had come, and that, as I was at home, I must come down to her. Now Miss Crossley is a maiden aunt, from whom we have expectations, and, therefore, though it irritated

me to have this, as I believed, complete interruption to my writing, for I imagined the old lady would stay to tea, yet I knew my wife was quite right, and that see Miss Crossley I must, if I did not wish to run the risk of offending her, thereby losing all chance of inheriting her snug little property, which she has more than once hinted we have a prospect of doing. So down I went to pay court to the old spinster, of course, concealing my irritation at her having disturbed me from a more congenial occupation.

To my delight she declined remaining to tea, and was just about leaving when Mrs. Gibson, my wife's mother, made her appearance. This caused a fresh delay, but, as I did not consider it necessary to treat her with the same ceremony as Miss Crossley, I, as soon as I could, made my excuses and departed up-stairs, saying I would leave her and my wife to have a comfortable chat together, but thinking how much rather I would continue my tale than listen to the trivialities and unmeaning talk of Mrs. Gibson.

I now wrote on uninterruptedly for nearly an hour, and was turning my attention to the part where Don Carlos is in the Inquisition. I had just written—

‘The night was dark and tempestuous—not

a star shed a single ray of light.' If you notice, it is always the correct thing in fiction to have your nights thus, or else resplendent with moonlight—there is no medium. 'Shrouded in that darkness, and in secrecy lay the precincts of the terrible Inquisition. There, in one of the secret chambers, shrouded in black, illumined by the light of torches—the dreadful torture-room—sat the stern and pitiless judges, surrounded by a host of the black and forbidding "Familiars."

'Preparations are evidently being made for a trial; and now, at a signal, a prisoner, sternly guarded, is brought before the dread tribunal.'

At this point I was interrupted by the entrance of my wife, and as I glanced at her, I saw she was in tears.

'Why, Maria, what is the matter now? and where is your mother?' I said kindly.

'Mother is gone; she could not stay to-day,' she replied in a broken voice.

'Well!' I interrupted, 'I suppose you're not crying about that?'

'No, I'm not,' returned Maria a little sharply; then subsiding again into the melancholy tone, she continued,—

'Mother has been finding such fault—says I don't manage the house well, and that the children look dirty, which I am sure they don't, the darlings; and how can I manage

better with such a poor, stupid servant as Eliza ?’

Now, to tell the truth, Mrs. Gibson, with all her shortcomings in other respects, is clever in domestic economy, while I don't think Maria has ever displayed any particular aptitude for it. As to the children, Master Freddy and Jack, notwithstanding the free application of soap and water, and fresh pinafores, still retained so much evidence on their faces and hands of their pen-and-ink exploits of the morning, that it was scarcely to be wondered that Mrs. Gibson thought them looking dirty. However, I say nothing of this to my wife, but endeavour to soothe her wounded feelings. When I have succeeded in doing so, I make her sit down and read a portion of what I have just written. She enjoys the quiet and my reading, as she always takes an interest in my compositions. I have just got to the part where I describe about Don Miguel's little son, when my daughter Mary rushes in with—

‘Oh! mamma, do come down, Freddy is letting all the sawdust out of my doll.’

So my wife has to make a sudden exit, fearing the children may get into worse mischief, and I return to my writing.

I now continued some time without interruption, and had got to that part of my story

where Don Gusman is administering the poison secretly to Don Miguel's child, under the guise of sweetmeats, and had just written—

‘The innocent boy readily and unsuspectingly took what he believed was offered him out of kindness, but which was in reality given with such deadly hatred and revenge’—when Eliza rushed upstairs and opened the door suddenly, and said—

‘Oh! do come down, sir, little Tommy has swallowed—’

‘Not the poison!’ I interrupted, my mind being still impressed with what I have just written.

To which the girl replied,—

‘Oh, I do hope he ain’t poisoned, sir, but he has swallowed a farthing.’

At this news I rush down, and find my wife almost in hysterics, the other children crying, and Master Tommy, my youngest, roaring most lustily. It was perfectly evident the farthing had not stuck in his throat.

I tell the children somewhat angrily to ‘hold their noise,’ and my wife ‘not to be a fool, as the boy seems little hurt by what he has swallowed.’

A sort of lull ensues, but my wife entreats me between her sobs ‘to fetch the doctor, as we don’t know what consequences may ensue.’

I agree to this, provided she keeps herself quiet, and proceed to fetch our family medical man. He returns with me, prescribes a few simple remedies, and then leaves. Peace and quiet are now restored to our household, but I do not again return to my study, but pass the evening in nursing little Tommy, who, I may remark, took no harm from swallowing the farthing, and reading aloud to my wife what I had managed to write, notwithstanding the numerous interruptions that had occurred during the day.

Only when the children are in bed, and Maria and I seated comfortably together, do we laugh over some of the occurrences of the day, and Maria concludes by saying she hopes, when next I have a holiday, I shall be more fortunate, and not have so many interruptions to my writing, and I echo her sentiments.

It now only remains for me to add that I hope the reader will not forget to take in the numbers of *The Cosmopolitan Miscellany*, containing my tale of 'The Lover's Stratagem; or, The Bandit's Revenge,' which, I expect, will be finished before long, as I trust greater progress will be made by me in future than I was able to accomplish in the day given in these pages, which I have penned in the hope, if other authors are troubled in a similar manner, they

may take comfort by thinking they are not the only sufferers in this way ; and I trust, whatever interruptions they may have, they may all end as well as mine did in what I have recorded as the ' Events of a Day.'





ROSE MELTON.

A STORY OF HUMBLE LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

‘**Q**UH, mother! I have lost the prize! Harriet Carter has got it, and—I can’t help feeling sorry—it was such a pretty workbox.’ And Rose Melton’s lips quivered, and her tears began to fall.

‘Never mind, my child; you have done all you could to gain it, and you have your mother’s praise for your reward, even if you have nothing else.’

‘Thank you, dear mother,’ said Rose, throwing her arms round her, and kissing her; ‘and I’ll try not to mind so very much about the prize since you don’t think it was my fault that I lost it.’ And soon Rose was discussing almost

cheerfully about what to her was an event in life. But we must now say a few words in explanation.

Mrs. Melton, the mother of Rose, was a widow, having lost her husband, who was foreman in a factory, by an accident. Since that time she had supported herself by dressmaking, and as she had considerable taste for that employment, and had only one child to support, she contrived to make a very tolerable living, and, when our story opens, dwelt in a neat little cottage in the pleasant and quiet village of Briarwood.

At the other end of the village lived the Carters. Harriet, the eldest daughter, a girl more than fifteen, has been already mentioned by Rose as her successful rival for the school prize—the last either was likely to gain, as both were on the eve of leaving school; for Rose Melton, being now fourteen, and having acquired a sufficient modicum of useful knowledge to fit her for her class in life, her mother thought she might now become initiated into the mysteries of dressmaking, and Rose was not unwilling to accede to her mother's wishes. Harriet, on the contrary, was not destined for any particular vocation at present, for her parents were, for their station in life, well-to-do people, Mr. Carter being a plumber and

glazier on his own account, and having a good business connection in the neighbouring towns. As they lived in a more substantial and comfortable dwelling, and had more money to spare, they considered themselves above Mrs. Melton; nevertheless, a kind of school-girl friendship had sprung up between Harriet and Rose, though they were very different in temper and disposition. Harriet being what is called 'high spirited,' with a violent temper when provoked, was rather selfish, and decidedly vain, yet she was not entirely devoid of good and generous feelings, and would, from mere impulse, often do a right or a kind action. Rose, on the contrary, although a year younger, acted more from principle, was of a gentle, affectionate, unselfish disposition, with scarcely a spark of vanity; indeed, her aim seemed to be rather to do what was right than to seek praise; and, without having Harriet's high spirits, she possessed a bright, cheerful temperament that would probably enable her to bear up bravely against those sorrows of life which she might be called upon to endure.

Time passed on, and Rose, who was now eighteen, had become proficient in dressmaking, and had, moreover, developed into a very pretty young woman, with good regular features, bright brown eyes and hair, a clear

pink and white complexion, and a tall well-knit figure; her mother used jestingly to call her 'her blooming Rose.'

At this period, owing to a good deal of additional building in the neighbouring towns, there was a considerable influx of workmen, and amongst them was a young man of the name of Matthew Freeman, a stone mason, who dwelt for the time close to Briarwood. Having made the acquaintance of a friend of Mrs. Melton's, he was soon taken to the widow's little cottage, and thus he and Rose became acquainted with each other, and soon a warmer feeling sprang up, and one day he asked her to become engaged to him. To this Rose assented, for she had gradually become much attached to the pleasant, clever young workman; and he, on his part, seemed greatly taken with pretty, cheerful Rose. Mrs. Melton was now made acquainted with the state of affairs, though she had not, of course, been wholly unaware of the growing attachment between her daughter and Matthew Freeman. She offered no objection, except that she expressed a hope that Matthew would not take her child from her just yet.

'Nay, mother,' answered Rose quickly; 'you must not think of being separated from us—you must always live with us.' But Mat-

thew Freeman did not echo this sentiment ; perhaps Mrs. Melton noticed this, for she replied,—

‘I don’t know about living with you, Rose dear ; I think I would rather keep on in my old quarters, and leave you young ones to make a new nest of your own’—this with a smile to both, but then she added more gravely,—

‘What I meant was that you, Matthew, should settle down in or near this village, so that I might be able to see my daughter occasionally, and not feel that she was entirely separated from me.’

To which Freeman replied that he had no objection to remain at Briarwood, provided he could make a living, which he thought there seemed every prospect of his doing, and this question being settled, Matthew’s visits to widow Melton’s cottage became regular and frequent ; and when in the summer evenings he and Rose would stroll out together, not a girl in the village but envied Rose Melton. Even Harriet Carter, who was now a smart ladies’ maid with some pretensions to beauty, though of a rather coarser, bolder kind than Rose, and who was not without her admirers ; even Harriet Carter envied her, for secretly she would not have been at all displeased if good-looking Matthew Freeman had chosen

her instead of Rose ; for with all her efforts to obtain a suitor, and she was a decided flirt, Harriet had not succeeded in being positively engaged to any one—young men seemed to like to laugh and talk and amuse themselves with her, but did not seem inclined to care for her as a wife.

There was not so great an intimacy between Rose and Harriet now as there had been when they were children, and they only very seldom met ; but this, perhaps, was partly caused from the fact that Harriet was now seldom at home.

Nearly a year sped on, and Rose was now looking forward to being married, and had begun her preparations for that event. Time had deepened her attachment for Matthew Freeman, but this did not cause her love for her mother to be weakened—indeed, as she would sometimes say in a merry, affectionate way, ‘her heart was large enough for both.’

Rose was very happy at this period, and in consequence she looked prettier than ever, and Matthew felt proud of his choice. Had he chosen Rose merely for her pretty face without any regard to the beauty of her disposition ?—We shall see.

Although both mother and daughter had seen a good deal of Matthew Freeman they did not thoroughly understand his character,

for circumstances had either not tended to draw it forth, or had given only the favourable side to it. If Mrs. Melton had thoroughly understood Matthew at this period it is more than probable she would have endeavoured, if possible, to have dissuaded her daughter from marrying him, not that Matthew could be charged with any absolute vices, secret or otherwise. He was thoroughly steady, honest, and industrious, and seemed tolerably even tempered. What more, you say, could be wanting to make a good workman—a good husband for Rose? For a good workman these were of course essential qualities, yet something more was wanting to make a good husband. True, he was honest, because he knew even in worldly policy that it answered best, and he was ambitious, not with the laudable ambition of making the best use of all the opportunities vouchsafed him by Providence, but with a restless, eager, feverish ambition that was determined to sacrifice everyone and everything that was likely to stand in the way of his advancement. True, he was steady and industrious, but it was this same ambition that kept him so. If anything should occur to check his progress, if unexpected and insurmountable difficulties should arise in his path, or if these difficulties could only seemingly be surmounted by a de-

parture from what was just and right, then would Matthew keep in the path of duty?

What guarantee was there that he would always be the steady, industrious workman he was now? For Freeman, though Mrs. Melton and Rose knew it not, was unhappily devoid of any religious principle. As he always accompanied mother and daughter to a place of worship, as he was reverent in his demeanour there, and as he never uttered a sentiment thereon which they could disapprove, they had, perhaps, too easily taken it for granted that he was a good man. Alas! he only went to church because he thought it made him more respectable to do so. Alas! he said nothing against religion, because he was perfectly indifferent to it. He was no more guided by any of its principles than if he had been a respectable heathen. Reader, do you blame Mrs. Melton that she allowed her daughter to become engaged to this man? If so, remember that she was only able to judge by outward appearances, and appearances were all in Matthew's favour. Do you blame Rose for loving such a man? Think again—she was but eighteen when she became engaged to him—too young to probe the depths of a character like his—too young for him to seem ought but what was desirable in her eyes.

Blame her not—nor think less of her that she entertained that deep love for Matthew Freeman, for at this period few—very few—and none so young and confiding as was Rose Melton—but what would have considered him desirable in almost any relation of life.

It was April—a warm, bright evening in April—and Rose and Matthew had not long returned from a walk. They were now with Mrs. Melton, sitting chatting merrily, and Matthew was describing how he had been with Rose to see the cottage he thought of taking to be their future home; and she, not without blushing slightly, and at first a little shyly, though soon with happy eagerness, entered into the subject. As Matthew gazed at her, he felt prouder than ever of his choice, and his parting that evening from ‘his beautiful Rose,’ as he called her, was more warm and tender than usual; and as she watched him from the little garden-gate, he turned more than once, and waved his hand in token of affection to her, and his signal was returned.

The evening was fine, yet dark clouds had arisen in the background of the sky, seeming to betoken a change of weather on the morrow. Rose, although her lover was now out of sight, continued to gaze on the scene before her, most probably absorbed for the moment in some

happy day-dream. Dream on, fair Rose, while you may, for sad will be the awakening to the realities of life! Let thy memory graven on thy mind as upon a rock this happy evening, for it is the last thou shalt know for weeks and months—ay, even for years!

But Rose—pretty, graceful, light-hearted Rose—thought not for an instant of any shadow that might come to cast a gloom over her future; her mind was rather filled with visions of happiness as she retraced her steps to her mother's cottage—visions which accompanied her even in her soft and child-like slumbers, and which then took the form of happy dreams.

And the clouds, which had gathered so densely, now rolled away, and the stars now glittered in the peaceful sky above the widow's cottage—above Rose Melton. Would not some star of comfort also arise for her in the night of sorrow and gloom that would but too shortly close around her?

CHAPTER II.

ON the following day affairs did not present so bright a prospect to Rose; her mother was

very unwell, and Matthew came to tell her that he was now employed on work at a distant town, and should probably be absent some weeks. Rose looked so grave and sad at this announcement, that her lover rallied her in a good-natured way, and asked her in jest if she thought he would forget her, to which Rose replied, with an attempt to smile—

‘No, dear Matthew, no doubt of your love and constancy troubles me, but—but—I feel as if something were going to happen.’

‘Well, what should happen?’ returned Freeman. ‘Cheer up, Rose darling, I dare say I shall be back sooner than you expect, when I hope to find your mother better, and you ready to be my own Rose,’ and the young man looked at her so archly that a blush overspread Rose’s pretty face. Then, with an affectionate farewell, the young man left. But, though his presence had for the time chased away that depression, or presentiment of evil, which Rose could not account for, yet when he was gone the feeling seemed gradually to settle down on her again. Perhaps it might have been partly caused by the fact that this was the first separation from her lover since she had been engaged, and still more by the fact that Mrs. Melton, who scarcely, even in Rose’s memory, ailed anything, had sud-

denly become undeniably ill. Still, with the vivacity of youth, Rose almost succeeded in throwing off this unaccountable depression, by picturing the meeting with Matthew Freeman, and with hope that her mother would be better on the morrow. But Mrs. Melton was not better on the morrow ; on the contrary, she was much worse. The doctor was obliged to be sent for, and he pronounced that Mrs. Melton had caught a fever, and that some time would probably elapse before she would recover. Rose, at this communication, felt as if the intangible evil she had been dreading had now assumed shape and come ; and yet so strange and complex is the human mind, that now Rose was not only composed, but active and even cheerful, for not yet had she realised the fearful nature of her mother's disease ; besides, hope is so natural to the young, and Rose never for one moment thought but what her mother would get better. Then she had a few lines from Matthew, and managed to send him a few in return, and this simple circumstance caused Rose pleasure. But soon Mrs. Melton became so alarmingly ill, that Rose forgot everything but her mother,—that mother whom she so fondly loved,—for the terrible fear that she might lose her had now arisen in Rose's mind. Days passed on, and at length Mrs. Melton's illness seemed

to have taken a favourable turn, and it was thought the worst was over, and, oh! how thankful Rose felt when her beloved mother was pronounced out of danger.

Poor Rose, she was looking pale and heavy-eyed, but this, perhaps, was caused by the anxiety and fatigue of nursing, which had, however, been shared by a kind neighbour. At length, just as Mrs. Melton seemed getting a little better, Rose was taken with the fever, and it soon became apparent that her case was more malignant than her mother's. At this period, Matthew Freeman wrote again to Rose, saying he hoped to be back again in about ten days, that he trusted her mother was going on favourably, and that no harm had come to his pretty Rose. But this letter Rose knew nothing about; she was now unconscious to all around her; indeed, her life was despaired of, and Mrs. Melton, who had recovered sufficiently to miss her daughter's gentle, loving care, knew that she was very ill with the fever, and by degrees she extracted from the neighbour who was attending to her, and who, perhaps, was not sufficiently guarded in her replies to Mrs. Melton's questions, the fact that it was not thought her daughter could recover. Whether it was this intelligence, or that, in her anxiety to get better, she had put

herself too forward, is uncertain, but from this time Mrs. Melton suffered a relapse ; and just as Rose began to take a turn for the better, her mother died. Still Rose was unconscious of the fact. The funeral of Mrs. Melton took place, and still her daughter remained ignorant of her loss. At length, it could no longer be concealed from her, as she began to make so many inquiries about her mother, and even asked if she could not see her. At this last inquiry she seemed to comprehend, by the sad expression on the faces round her, that something fresh, of a distressing nature, had occurred, and murmured,—

‘ My mother ! Matthew.’

‘ Matthew Freeman is all right, my poor child,’ said a sympathising neighbour. ‘ But your poor mother—your poor mother—’ the neighbour hesitated, fearing to disclose the truth, yet not knowing what else to say.

‘ Yes, yes—my mother,’ replied Rose quickly, and in her eagerness she partially raised herself in bed, and gazed almost wildly. Then she gasped,—

‘ What of my mother ? Oh, tell me !’

In low and tremulous accents was the reply given,—

‘ Your mother became worse—much worse. We did all we could, but we could not save her.’

At these words Rose uttered a low moan and

sank back upon her pillow. Then the fever once more resumed its sway, and Rose was again unconscious of all that passed around her. Sore was the struggle for life, but finally youth, aided by skill and care, triumphed, and three weeks after her mother's death Rose was once more out of danger, was now able to sit up for short intervals, had heard the particulars of her mother's death, and had become somewhat calmer under her grief. The one bright spot in her life—the one person whom she now desired to see—was Matthew Freeman. Yet, what a different meeting it would be now to what she had pictured a few short weeks ago ! Ah ! Matthew had been absent but little more than six weeks, and yet how much had happened in that brief period. Mrs. Melton ill, dead, and buried, and Rose, the pretty and blooming Rose of such a short time ago, now so very thin and pale, and with such a sad, worn expression of mingled grief and suffering, that she looked only the shadow of her former self. And Matthew came. He had heard of Mrs. Melton's death and Rose's illness, and was therefore in some measure prepared to see some alteration in her ; yet, truth to say, he was somewhat startled when he actually beheld the ravages caused by disease.

The pale, drawn, hollow-eyed face, which

had lost its abundant crown of hair, and was now shrouded by a neat cap—this, and the loose dress she now wore, seemed to make her look older.

As he clasped her frail form in his arms, Rose forgot for the moment all else but the joy of seeing him again. Then she remembered all that had occurred, and her tears began to flow. Matthew endeavoured to soothe her, not without some success, and when he had succeeded in calming her, he said,—

‘You have been very ill, Rose, darling,—more ill than I thought. You must have suffered a great deal.’

‘Yes, and I still suffer with my hip, which prevents my moving about, and I do so long to get out in the fresh air,’ and Rose looked wistfully towards the window.

‘I will try and get you a bath-chair,’ replied Matthew, ‘and when you are able to get out of doors, you will soon recover your strength.’

But Rose did not soon recover—indeed, in a certain sense, she would never recover—would never be the strong, bright, active girl she had been before her illness, and the fever had settled in her hip, causing her to be lame, and it was extremely doubtful whether she would ever be otherwise. But Rose was ignorant at present that her lameness was likely to be

permanent, nor did Matthew suspect it at first ; but when time went on, and Rose became stronger, and still the lameness remained, and she was still unable to move without assistance, Matthew became very uneasy, and this uneasiness was confirmed by a chance encounter with Harriet Carter, with whom he was slightly acquainted. Harriet, who now happened to be at home, had not been allowed to see Rose until it was considered that all fear of infection had passed away ; but she had seen her two or three times lately, and so had her mother, and Mrs. Carter pronounced it to be extremely improbable that Rose would ever recover from her lameness. Harriet had heard this, and when she happened to meet Matthew Freeman, and he, as was only natural, spoke much of Rose, she said,—

‘ It is a sad thing about poor Rose—her lameness, I mean.’

‘ But she will get over it in time,’ answered Freeman, in a sort of anxious questioning way.

Harriet shook her head gravely, and replied,—

‘ I am afraid not. Mother thinks she will always be lame, and will have to go about on crutches. It is very sad for her, and for you too, Mr. Freeman,’ and Harriet looked at him very sympathisingly.

What a contrast she presented now to Rose

Melton — she with her health and strength, bright colour, and smart attire. Matthew looked at her and sighed ; but still he would not believe, or rather said he would not believe, that Rose would be always lame ; but when he quitted Harriet the idea haunted him, and when he again saw Rose, he questioned her more closely why she was unable to walk about. She replied to his questions quite frankly. He saw she was wholly unconscious herself that there was even a probability that time would not cure her, and Matthew felt unwilling to add to her trouble by communicating his sad suspicions. She also told him that the doctor had recommended her to get about on crutches as a means of restoring her walking powers, and Matthew was somewhat startled by this announcement, which seemed in a manner to confirm what Harriet had told him.

For two or three days Matthew Freeman pondered over whether it could be possible that Rose was lame for life. At last he felt as if anything would be better than this suspense and uncertainty, and resolved to go and see the doctor who attended Rose, and get him to say whether there was hope or not that she might be cured. Arrived at the doctor's, Matthew put his question almost bluntly,—

‘Would Rose recover, or was she lame for life?’

At first the medical man tried to evade giving a direct answer, and replied in that oracular manner peculiar to doctors. Whereat Matthew became very impatient, almost fierce, and said—

‘ He was a plain man, and he wanted a plain answer to his question, Was Rose incurably lame ? ’

Then the doctor, who saw that it was the man’s anxiety that had caused what seemed like an exhibition of temper, announced the truth as kindly and gently as possible, that in all human probability Rose Melton would always be lame, but that, in time, she would be able to get about better than she did now, and that he (the doctor) considered it would be kindest to Rose to let time discover the fact to her, when she would probably become more easily reconciled to it. And Matthew Freeman, having obtained this knowledge, quitted the doctor’s house, a wiser, and certainly a sadder man.

It was the day following the one on which he had heard this announcement that he went to see Rose, who still dwelt at the same cottage, the neighbour who had nursed her residing for the present with her. As he entered the room, Rose hobbled to him on her crutches, which she was just beginning to use, and she said to him, with more cheerfulness than she had exhibited since her mother’s death,—

‘Look, Matthew, how well I can get about with these! It seems so nice to be able to move without being dependent on others. See, Matthew!’ and she moved a few steps very limpingly and slowly,—‘I shall soon be able to take a walk with you,’ and Rose smiled at him; but it was a little sadly, for it glanced across her memory what a change had occurred since she last walked with him. As to Matthew, he had gazed on her sadly on entering the room. *That* his Rose—his once bright, beautiful, blooming Rose! His thoughts flew back to that evening he had parted with her before her mother’s illness; to when she stood before him, with her tall, straight figure, and quick, graceful movements, with the colour of health upon her cheek, with brightness in her eyes, and with an almost merry expression of countenance. Now he beheld her with weak and drooping figure leaning on crutches—her movements slow and painful, her face pale, and bearing marks of recent suffering, which made her look much older; with eyes that looked preternaturally large and mournful, and with an expression that was now always very grave and quiet, and sometimes very sad. Yet, although her illness had robbed Rose of health, and colour, and vigour of frame, such as she had formerly possessed, it had not entirely robbed

her of a certain beauty of countenance ; but it was now a kind of beauty, which was, perhaps, difficult for a man like Matthew Freeman to understand or appreciate.

As she uttered the words,—‘I shall soon be able to take a walk with you,’ Matthew, remembering what the doctor had told him, sank into a chair, covered his face with his hands, and almost groaned. Rose, who looked first surprised, and then sad, slowly approached him, and laying her hand gently on his arm, said softly,—

‘What is it, Matthew? Tell me, what is the matter?’

To which at first Freeman returned no answer, and then said it was nothing.

‘Nothing,’ echoed Rose. ‘Ah, Matthew! will you not tell me? Will you not trust me? If, as I judge from your manner, it is some bad news, ought I not to know it? Do not let us have any secrets from one another, Matthew.’

She looked at him so pleadingly with her still beautiful brown eyes, and Matthew, who raised his head at this moment, caught the look, and drew her gently and lovingly towards him.

‘Oh, Rose!’ he murmured, ‘to think I should be the one to tell you this. No, no, I cannot.’

‘Yes, Matthew, you must. Should we not share each other’s sorrows as well as joys?’ replied Rose, who thought this trouble of which Freeman seemed to hint concerned him alone.

Thus entreated, he said in a hoarse tone, almost abruptly,—

‘It is about you, Rose—about your lameness, that I am troubled.’

‘About me. Why, I am getting on famously,’ she replied, in a relieved and almost cheerful tone.

Matthew was silent, and Rose, with a woman’s quickness, divined that there was still something to be told. Little by little she drew from Matthew, who was a bad hand at concealing anything, the opinions of the Carters, his visit to the doctor, and his opinion that Rose’s lameness would probably be permanent.

When Rose heard this, and when she fully realised it, which she did not for some minutes, it seemed so terrible a truth to her, that she would have fallen to the ground in her violent agitation, had she not been held by Matthew’s strong arm. He now endeavoured to comfort her by saying that doctors were not always right, that he himself had not given up hope yet, that she must bear up for his sake, etc., etc., and Rose, after a hard struggle, did become more composed before Matthew left her

But when alone, she pondered much, not only on what he had told her, but on what it involved.

If she was likely to be lame for life, was she a fit wife for Matthew Freeman ?

Ought she not to give him up ? This thought was so bitter to Rose that at first she endeavoured to put it from her ; but she was not one to shrink from a thing because it was painful ; and, having conceived it her duty to relinquish marriage with Matthew Freeman, she nerved herself to this avowal when next they met. But Matthew would not hear of being separated, and even urged her, on the impulse of the moment, to marry him at once. But this Rose refused to do, for though she did not doubt Matthew's truth, yet she thought it would be better that her lover should become more accustomed to seeing her as she was now, and being able to judge before it was too late whether she was indeed the wife he would have chosen.

Nearly a twelvemonth passed on after this, and Rose had for some months removed from her mother's cottage, and now dwelt with the neighbour who had kindly nursed her in her illness, whose name was Elmore, and who, like Mrs. Melton, was also a widow.

Here Matthew Freeman again continued his visits, but he had not again made any direct

proposal of the time when Rose should marry him. Still she, who although very delicate, had recovered sufficiently to resume the labours of the needle, and who had become almost resigned to her lameness, for she could now move about more easily and quickly on her crutches than at first—she had, perhaps, too easily persuaded herself that Matthew was as ready to claim her now as he had been in the bright days gone by; and yet, unknown to Rose, there was a change going on in Matthew's mind.

In his visits to Rose, he rather frequently encountered Harriet Carter, and she rarely failed to say something in allusion to Rose's present condition, which somehow fretted Matthew Freeman; and although she never said openly that it would be better for him to give up Rose, still she often contrived to insinuate that he would be much to be pitied for having such a wife. Gradually the train of thought suggested by Harriet's words began to bear fruit. At first, when the idea of parting with Rose dawned on his mind, he indignantly rejected it.

He loved Rose—he could not part with her, and the better side of his nature for a time prevailed. But then his ambition, his worst side, whispered,—‘How will you ever get on

with a sickly, ailing wife ? With one who is, and always will be, lame ? If you marry Rose, farewell to your schemes of ambition.' Then Matthew, being alone, would almost writhe and would murmur passionately—'Why, oh why did this happen ? If she had lost her beauty twenty times more than she has, I would have married her, if she had only been well and strong. Oh ! Rose, I can't give you up. Yet, I must—I must.' Yet, when Matthew saw Rose, he faltered in his resolution. Then over and over again would the same thoughts flit through his mind, and he felt like a miserable coward at this period, neither able to determine on parting with Rose, nor yet wishing to marry her. At length he felt things could not go on like this—that he must make up his mind ; and, alas ! he came to the determination that he could not marry Rose.

Then his visits to her became more seldom, and of shorter duration, and when questioned by Rose why he did not come as often as usual, he excused himself on the score of work, and said that he was very busy, and this excuse Rose received with no suspicion, that there was any other or deeper cause for the rarer visits of Matthew Freeman. He, on his part, had resolved many and many a time to tell her the whole truth—how he still loved her—how

it grieved him to part with her—how he trusted he might always be her friend, but that, under existing circumstances, it was impossible for him ever to marry her. But when he faced Rose, when he beheld the affection that beamed for him in the sweet, pensive, brown eyes, then his courage to tell her deserted him, and he would put it off until the next time.

Finally, he resolved to write what he had not the resolution to tell ; and, being on the eve of going to work some miles away for a time, he thought he could not do better than send his letter at this period. He found it difficult to write down what he had intended to tell her, and it took him a considerable time to execute it to his satisfaction, but at last it was finished and sent.

When Rose received this letter—when she clearly understood that Matthew Freeman had given her up—that she was parted from him for ever, for the written words left no doubt in her mind—she sat like one stunned for several minutes, then she moaned, ‘ Matthew, Matthew, come back to me ! Oh, my mother, that I had died with thee ! ’ Then at the thought of that kind and gentle mother, who would have sympathised and helped her in her present trouble, tears came to the relief of poor Rose, who now wept long and bitterly.

Truly, her's seemed a sad fate. She had but few friends, and no very near relations. Her mother and Matthew had been all to her. Her mother had been snatched away suddenly by death ; then all her thought and affection had centred on Matthew Freeman, and now he was lost to her, and life seemed an utter blank to poor, grief-stricken Rose.

Truly the night of sorrow had closed early upon her. The 'star of love' had set for ever. But would not other stars arise, less luminous, but more lasting, to cheer and aid the lonely life of gentle, patient, true-hearted Rose Melton ?

CHAPTER III.

THREE years have passed away since Rose Melton learnt the bitter truth that she and Matthew Freeman were parted—parted, as it seemed, for ever—for Matthew, a year after giving up Rose, had married. Rose soon heard of this, and what seemed to make it harder for her to bear, though she tried to struggle against this feeling, was the fact that it was Harriet Carter who was the wife of Matthew Freeman. Yes—she who had won the prize from Rose

when they were school-girls together, had now again been successful in winning what was so precious and valuable to poor Rose—the love and protection of Matthew Freeman. Yet had she won his love? Rose believed so; but it may be doubted whether in his heart of hearts Matthew did not love Rose still. Certainly his feelings for Harriet were, and always would be, very different. His affection for Rose had been the purest and most unselfish feeling of his life; but his marriage with Harriet Carter was rather one of expediency. Besides, she had in a manner courted him. As soon as she knew Rose's lameness was likely to prove incurable, she began to imagine that it was rather unlikely a man like Freeman would marry Rose, and if he did not marry her, what should hinder her, Harriet, from becoming his wife? So she laid her plans—and we have seen that under the guise of sympathy she succeeded in causing Matthew to break off his engagement with Rose.

Her next step was to visit an aunt at the town a few miles off, to which Freeman had betaken himself after he had sent his letter to Rose, and where he continued to remain. While there, Harriet contrived to see Matthew very often, and soon led him to see that proposals of marriage from him would be very

welcome to her ; and Matthew, who felt hopeless of ever finding another who should be to him like Rose, who, moreover, wished to marry and settle, and who thought that, as regards personal attractions and position, Harriet Carter was likely to prove a good match for him, did not hesitate long, and soon they were engaged. But this fact was for some little time kept secret, both feeling inwardly a little ashamed of what they had done—and Harriet more keenly than Matthew.

At length they were married ; and then, happily for poor Rose's peace of mind, they went to reside at the town already mentioned, which was sufficiently far from Briarwood to render it improbable that Rose would be likely to meet Harriet or Matthew Freeman, and thus rouse sad memories of the past.

Rose had now become quite calm and resigned to her altered life. She was now better in health, and could walk with the use of only one crutch. Her complexion was, and always would be, pale ; but the past drawn expression had passed away, and was succeeded by one which, if slightly pensive, was very placid. She had recovered her hair too, which, though not so abundant as formerly, yet added greatly to her appearance ; and, in spite of her lameness, any stranger would have pronounced

Rose Melton very interesting—some might even still have called her pretty. Of this number were Mrs. Elmore and her son Thomas. But, in order to render our story perfectly clear to our readers, it will, perhaps, be advisable to say a word or two about them.

Mrs. Elmore had been left a widow with two little boys about a year previous to the time when Mrs. Melton had lost her husband, and Mrs. Elmore was so impressed by the kindness of the Meltons at that sad period, that ever after they had been friends, which friendship seemed deepened by a similarity of circumstances when Mrs. Melton also became a widow, and by a mutual sympathy in each other's troubles, for Mrs. Elmore, about the time Mrs. Melton lost her husband, was mourning the death of her eldest child. Through all the years that intervened, the closest intimacy had been maintained between Mrs. Melton and Mrs. Elmore.

It was the latter who had helped Rose to nurse her mother; and when Rose herself took the fever, transferred her attentions to her—other assistance being procured to aid in nursing Mrs. Melton, who was then thought to be recovering. It was Mrs. Elmore who was present when her friend died; who endeavoured

to break the news gently to poor Rose, and remained with her during the early stages of convalescence. Mrs. Elmore was able to do this, as she was not dependent on her own exertions for a living. Her son Thomas, now a young man, had been apprenticed to a printer, and was at this period earning such good wages that he was able to support his mother in the pretty cottage where she had dwelt for so many years ; and, though she was not entirely without an occupation, still she was better off than Mrs. Melton and Rose, inasmuch as she was not entirely dependent on her own exertions.

When she thought that a little time would elapse before Rose could possibly marry Matthew Freeman, she at once suggested she should remove with her to her own cottage, saying she did not like being away from it longer, and that Rose was too unfit to be left alone. Rose acknowledging this, and also the kindness of Mrs. Elmore's offer, consented, only stipulating she should pay a suitable equivalent. After some demurring on Mrs. Elmore's part, it was finally agreed this arrangement should be entered into, if Rose found it necessary to remain with her more than a month.

We need scarcely remark that Rose did find it desirable to remain ; and when all hope of marrying Matthew Freeman had passed away—

when all her trouble had been confided to Mrs. Elmore, and soothed by her ready sympathy—while Rose shrank from the pity expressed by others—for, of course, in a village like Briarwood the main facts of the case were known to almost everyone. Then it became necessary for Rose Melton to think what she should do for a living, for the little savings accumulated by her mother were now entirely exhausted; indeed, if it had not been for Mrs. Elmore, they would not have lasted so long.

If Rose had been a lady, she would, doubtless, have sat down and nursed her grief, and considered it impossible she could take interest in anything, but the exigencies of her position made it imperative for her to consider the means of obtaining a livelihood. Much would she have liked to have quitted Briarwood, but in her lame and consequent feeble state, she felt how unwise it would be to leave a place where she was known, and where she might probably gain the means of support. She now made inquiries, and found that most of her mother's old customers were willing to employ her, she having decided on continuing the dressmaking.

It now became a question where she could find a permanent home.

When she mooted this question to Mrs. Elmore, the latter said,—

‘Are you not comfortable here, Rose?’

‘Only too comfortable, dear Mrs. Elmore.’

‘Then, why not continue to live here with me?’

‘But,’ remarked Rose, ‘I did not think you would like, perhaps, to have a permanent lodger, and one, too, who requires as much attention as myself,’ and she smiled such a sad smile that it brought the tears to Mrs. Elmore’s eyes. However, she hastily repressed them, and replied cheerfully,—

‘I shall only be too glad if you will stay with me, Rose dear, for until you came I often spent many lonely hours; for you know my son Tom can only come now and then to see me, and he said, the very last time he was here, “Mother, it’s a pity you can’t get some one you would like to live with you, and I wish Rose Melton was going to stay;” and now you are. Is it not so, Rose? May I not consider it as settled?’ And it was thus settled, Rose acknowledging it would be a great relief to her to continue in her present abode. Thus they had gone on living harmoniously together, and if Rose could have blotted out the remembrance of Matthew she would not have been unhappy at this period, for time had now softened her

grief for her mother into a tender, loving memory. Her sedentary occupation prevented her feeling her lameness as much as she otherwise would, and she had the pleasure of finding it sufficiently remunerative to dispel any doubts she might have entertained about being a burden on Mrs. Elmore. The latter always attended to the domestic affairs, and also aided Rose by assisting her with the heavier portions of her needlework, and in time they had such a good business that it became quite a joint affair. Thus they proved a mutual benefit to each other. But this is anticipating a little, and we must now return to the period when Rose had decided on residing permanently with Mrs. Elmore.

It was about six months after this that a rumour reached her that Matthew Freeman was engaged to Harriet Carter. At first she did not believe it—even Mrs. Elmore, who had been more violent in her denunciations of Matthew's conduct than was approved of by Rose—even Mrs. Elmore could hardly credit that he had apparently so soon forgotten Rose Melton. But soon the rumour was confirmed, and soon—very soon it seemed to Rose—she heard of Matthew's and Harriet's marriage.

This event caused another painful struggle in her mind, for as long as Matthew remained

single, she had thought it no sin to think of and love him still. Now he was the husband of another, and must henceforth be viewed in a different light. The Matthew she had known and loved was gone for ever. True, she could not blot out the past from her memory—could never, while life should last, forget that happy time when Matthew had been by her side ; but there must for ever now be a strong line of demarcation between the Matthew Freeman—the lover of her bright young days—and Matthew Freeman the husband of Harriet Carter.

With this exception, the time, as we have said, passed regularly and peacefully to Rose Melton ; the monotony of her and Mrs. Elmore's life being only broken by the occasional visits of the latter's son, Thomas Elmore ; and Thomas, who was about the same age as Rose, had known her from childhood, but circumstances had prevented his seeing much of her. He had known of her engagement to Matthew Freeman, and also that it was broken off, and why. He felt sincerely sorry for Rose's misfortunes ; but, with a delicacy unusual in his class of life, he abstained from loud or obtrusive sympathy, and for this reason Rose seemed, next to his mother, to prefer his company. It was he who suggested another doctor, by whose skilful treatment Rose was so much

benefited as to be able to move about with one crutch. He who, whenever at home, would plan little excursions, either driving his mother and Rose to the place fixed on, or taking Rose in a bath-chair, if it was not too far for the others to walk. He who sent books and periodicals for her and his mother to read, and would also read aloud to them when he chanced to come over in the long evenings.

Gradually, as Thomas Elmore became more intimately acquainted with Rose, a deeper interest than compassion for her was awakened in his mind. As he saw her brave endurance, her patience, her industry, her cheerfulness, and her affection for his mother. As he began to believe that he was not altogether unwelcome in her eyes, the wish began to make itself felt that Rose should give him the right to love and protect her, and render any further working for a living on her part totally unnecessary.

That summer, three years after parting with Matthew Freeman, she seemed better and happier than she had been since her illness; and Harriet, who had happened to come over to Briarwood to see her parents, had met Rose being wheeled in her chair by Thomas Elmore, and had even spoken to her, though in a constrained sort of way, and with no allusion

to the changed circumstances of either. Harriet had told Matthew that Rose appeared a great deal better, and that, for her part, she should not wonder if, in the end, she married that son of Mrs. Elmore's, who, she heard, was always coming over to Briarwood now. Perhaps Harriet said this somewhat maliciously, for she had a shrewd suspicion, amounting almost to a certainty, that her husband never loved her as he had Rose; that though, so far as marrying him was concerned, she had won him, yet that she had not won his thoughts and affection entirely to herself—that there was a period in Matthew's life in which she, Harriet, had no concern, to which he looked back with regret,—for there were times when he would sit moody and abstracted, and Harriet felt tolerably sure, by the irritable way in which he answered her at those times, that his thoughts had flown to the past—to Rose Melton,—and you may be sure this conviction did not tend to happiness.

Had Matthew made a wise exchange when he took Harriet instead of Rose?

Often would he ask himself that question, when he saw how extravagant Harriet was inclined to be; how, instead of aiding him in his schemes of ambition, she was all for spending and amusement, saying,—

‘What was the good of earning, if you were not to have some enjoyment with it!’

When he saw how opposed to him she was in this; when he saw how she was engrossed with self, and how little sympathy she had in his pursuits and plans; when he beheld her exhibition of violent temper whenever he ventured to cross her wishes in the least; her impatience under the most trivial suffering, often brought about by her own obstinacy; then his thoughts would involuntarily fly to Rose, and he would feel ready to curse the day when he had married Harriet Carter.

Ah! his repentance had come too late. But was it repentance? This may be doubted, for if he had been truly repentant, would he not have seen that the fault lay most in himself, and have endeavoured to do all that lay in his power to render Harriet’s, and thus his own, life happier. As it was, theirs was not a bright prospect; mutually tired of each other, though married little more than three years, how would they spend their future lives together? Ah! how many marry hastily, to find, like Harriet and Matthew Freeman, how ill-suited they are to each other, and what misery they have heaped up for themselves in the future? But we must now leave the Freemans and return to Rose Melton.

As we have already hinted, a warm feeling of love and interest for Rose had sprung up in the heart of Thomas Elmore, and, at the close of the summer we have mentioned, he asked her whether she would not consent to become his wife. But Rose, though she sincerely liked young Elmore, yet refused his offer. At first he thought she did so from some scruples about her lameness, and so he, in a manner that would have done honour to one in a higher station, hinted that this circumstance should be no barrier; nay, he rather pleaded it as a greater reason why Rose should accept him, saying how tenderly he would guard her. Then he urged his suit with greater earnestness, but still to no purpose.

It is probable that if Thomas Elmore had offered himself previous to Matthew Freeman, Rose might then have accepted him, for he was far better suited for her than Matthew. He was better educated, more refined in manner and appearance. As regards circumstances, he was, perhaps, quite as well off as Matthew Freeman, and last, though not least, he was a far better man. Had he been engaged to Rose, previous to her illness, he would never have behaved to her as Matthew had done.

It seemed a pity that Rose could not like this young man well enough to marry him.

She even regretted it herself—regretted—that she should have innocently roused hopes in his mind which could not be fulfilled. But Rose was endued with a rare nature. She could endure, but she could not barter her affection for the sake of a home ; she could not, in spite of his superior qualities, transfer the love she had once felt for Matthew Freeman, and which might be said to be held in abeyance rather than destroyed—she could not transfer this love to another, however worthy that other might be.

When Thomas saw that Rose's rejection of him was final—that there was no hope he might ever call her his own—he was truly grieved ; yet no unkind feeling arose in consequence of his rejection by her whom he had truly loved and hoped to win.

He still sent books and periodicals, and even occasionally a kind, though guarded, message to Rose through his mother, which she would return in the same manner ; but he never came—weeks lengthened out into months, and still Thomas Elmore never visited his home—had never been since he abruptly quitted it after his rejection by Rose. This state of things seemed particularly hard on Mrs. Elmore, who not only saw that her secret wish of Rose becoming her daughter-in-law was at an end, which

she much regretted, being sincerely attached to her, but she was by this circumstance deprived of seeing her son ; but out of regard to Rose she did not urge that he should resume his visits.

At length Rose herself said, ‘ That if she were to be the means of separating mother and son, she should at once leave Mrs. Elmore.’ When Thomas heard this he once more visited his home—at first, at long intervals, then a little more frequently, and as time went on everything seemed gradually to subside into its old accustomed way.

Of the Freemans nothing was known at Briarwood, except that they had had a child and lost it, and had now gone to live several miles away.

We shall now leave them and Rose Melton for the next few years, and resume the thread of our narrative in the next and last chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

EIGHT years have elapsed since we last saw Rose Melton, and nearly thirteen since that pleasant evening in April, when she parted merrily with Matthew Freeman at the gar-

den-gate of her mother's cottage ; thus Rose is now two-and-thirty years of age.

She is again dwelling in that same cottage, and children's voices may now be heard there. Did Rose then relent and marry Thomas Elmore after all ? No. Thomas has at the present time a wife, that even his mother, who was hard to please, likes—but it is not Rose. Did she then marry some one else, as time went on ? No. Had she, by a series of circumstances, become the second wife of Matthew Freeman, whom, we may suppose, she would not find it very hard to forgive ? No. Rose is Rose Melton still ; yet Matthew is now a widower, and these two children who dwell with Rose belong to him. How this happened will soon be explained.

About eight or nine months previous to this period she had received two or three lines scrawled by Harriet, in which the latter had entreated Rose to come and see her, as she was very ill—indeed, believed she should not live long—for the Freemans were at this time at Briarwood. The years that had passed had brought a certain modicum of success, as regards pecuniary matters, to Matthew Freeman ; but his life now was far from being what he had once pictured it. He was considerably altered from the lover of Rose Melton—was

no longer the good-looking, smart workman. His face now bore a constant expression of ill-humour; his attire presented a careless, almost an untidy appearance, notwithstanding that he generally wore good clothes. Life did not seem altogether to have prospered with Matthew Freeman; and from his appearance it was evident that the past years had not been happy ones. Ah! he had better have been true to Rose Melton—she would have made him a better wife than Harriet. Harriet was also more changed than the lapse of years warranted. She had had four children, but the eldest and the third had died; the two that remained were a little girl of seven, and a little boy aged two. Since the birth of her last child, Harriet had not been so strong as formerly; a cold she caught, by going out too thinly clad one cold spring day, had settled on her chest, and, having been neglected in the early stages, had developed into consumption. No one who had seen Harriet when our story opened would have supposed that she would have fallen a victim to this disease, but it appeared some relatives of hers had died of this complaint, which her own want of care and prudence had now developed in herself.

When she found, notwithstanding the re-

medies prescribed, that she got no better, she took a sudden whim that she should recover if she went to her native place, Briarwood. For some time Matthew resisted this desire, for he, at least, had no wish to go there; but the ceaseless pining and peevish reiteration of this longing on the part of Harriet at length prevailed. So to Briarwood they had come, and at first Harriet was buoyed up with the idea she was better; but soon there came a change—soon she was obliged to confess that she was worse instead of better. Then the knowledge—oh! how bitter it seemed to Harriet Freeman!—that she had not much longer to live; that her life, which seemed to her so short, was drawing to a close! What grave, sad thoughts flitted through her mind! What a mistake she felt her life to have been! She turned in her extremity to her husband; but, alas! there she found little to help or comfort her. Were there none whom, in her health and gaiety she had called friends, who would by love and sympathy smooth her downward path? Ah! those acquaintances who had been most ready to seek her company, while she could afford them amusement, were as ready to shun her, now that she was ill and sad.

Then there came the remembrance of Rose Melton. But, after all that had occurred, would

Rose come? Could she expect it—she, whose conscience now smote her that she had been but a treacherous friend to poor Rose? Had she been as anxious that Matthew should be true to Rose as she had been, that he should marry herself, might not things have been very different? And Harriet now reproached herself for the part she had then played. Still her thoughts recurred again and again to Rose, and at last she scrawled to her the following lines:—

‘DEAR ROSE,—I am very ill, and I know I shall not live very long, and I have such a wish to see you. Oh! for the sake of those days when we were happy girls together, do come to your suffering and repentant HARRIET.’

Perhaps some might have experienced a feeling akin to triumph, at finding one who had been their rival reduced thus low. Not so, Rose, who, on receipt of this short note, felt little beside compassion for the unfortunate Harriet—and her thoughts flew back to the past—to their school-girl friendship—then, on through succeeding years, and she could now regard, without bitterness, the fact that Harriet had married Matthew Freeman.

So Rose visited Harriet, and these two were once more face to face. But there was not

that contrast now between them that there had been in past years—true, Rose still looked rather delicate. True, she was still lame, and made use of her crutch when she had to go a distance, though she could move about a room without it, still her clear eyes and pale complexion looked healthy beside Harriet's hectic colour and hollow cheeks. Rose, too, was now by far the prettier of the two, for Harriet's beauty had depended much on youth and health, and her disease seemed to have made sad ravages in her appearance. Matthew was particularly struck when he again saw Rose Melton, with the little change time had wrought in her ; indeed, since he last beheld her, that change seemed all in her favour ; yet there was a difference, as Matthew saw, and which he felt, though he owned to himself, with a sigh, that it was only right and natural. Yes, there seemed almost a dignity about the quiet, pale, lame Rose, which she had not possessed in former years. The mouth, too, the once soft tremulous* mouth, now bore an expression of resolution and firmness that was never seen there in the old days.

When Rose made her first visit to Harriet, she went at a time when she judged Matthew would be absent, for she thought the meeting between herself and Harriet would be more

unrestrained if they were alone ; but afterwards, she made no particular effort to avoid him. On their first interview he had appeared awkward and constrained, but her manner, calm and self-possessed, tintured with a slight coldness, soon restored him to his usual manner ; and during the different times that he saw Rose (for while Harriet lived, she went to see her frequently), he never could tell from her behaviour to himself that she at all regretted the past, or hardly remembered it.

During her first visit to Harriet, the latter tried to explain why she wanted to see her.

‘It is to beg your forgiveness, Rose, for the part I have acted towards you.’

‘Indeed, Harriet, I am sure I have nothing to forgive you.’

‘Yes, yes, indeed you have ; and I am so glad you have come, for now I can tell you all. I was so afraid you would not come.’

‘Surely it would have been very unkind of me not to have done so.’

‘Ah !’ returned Harriet, ‘I am afraid there are many that would not.’

‘But why should I refuse to come ?’

‘Rose, Rose, if you have forgotten the past,’ replied Harriet, ‘I have not, and it lies on my conscience now, that I was in a great measure the cause of Matthew giving you up.’

Rose started and turned paler than usual; then she replied a little hastily,—

‘Don’t, Harriet; don’t allude to the past. What is done cannot be undone.’

At these words Harriet seemed to comprehend that though Rose had forgiven the past, she had not forgotten it.

Forgotten it! Had it not been impressed by months—and even years of suffering? Had it not robbed Rose of all joy, though she seemed to have found peace, and that quiet happiness which flows from a steady performance of duty. Harriet now resumed,—

‘Forgive me, Rose, if I cause you pain. Heaven knows I would not do so willingly; but I feel as if I owed it to you, and also to Matthew, to explain the past.’

Rose murmured something about Harriet taxing her strength, and advised it being deferred to another time.

‘No,’ replied Harriet, ‘I am feeling rather better to-day. Let me tell you while I am able. All I ask is that you listen to me patiently.’

Rose acquiesced. Then Harriet confessed how she had, over and over again, suggested the thought to Matthew what a drawback it would be to him to have a lame wife—how she feared she had in this way caused Rose’s separation from Freeman—how she had in a great measure

‘courted him.’ ‘Indeed, Rose,’ she added, ‘I don’t suppose if my admiration of him had not been so open, that he would ever have thought of me. As it was, though he married me, I am sure he never loved me as he did you, Rose.’

At these words Rose felt a throb of mingled pleasure and pain, but she remained silent. ‘At first, when I was married,’ continued Harriet, ‘I tried hard to gain his love—perhaps I did not set about it in the right way;’ here she sighed, ‘for I did not succeed very well. Then I grew reckless, spent his money more freely, went out a great deal more than he liked, and did many things that vexed him, and, as time went on, we grew wider apart. I am afraid it was as much, if not more, my fault than his. The trouble of losing our children, especially the one between little Lucy and Johnny, brought us rather more together, and since I have been ill, Matthew has been kinder to me than he ever was. Don’t think I complain of my husband—he is a better man than I am a woman, for he has had some excuse for what he did, I have had none. Tell me, good, kind Rose, that you forgive me? for ah! dear, with all you have suffered, I think you have been happier than we have—and I am sure you have deserved to be.’

Rose assured Harriet of her forgiveness, and, after a few more words, that first visit termi-

nated, but not without a promise it should soon be repeated.

During one of Rose's visits to Harriet, the latter said,—

‘Do you remember the work-box that I gained years ago as a school prize?’

‘Yes; is that it?’ replied Rose, glancing towards a small side table on which it stood.

‘Yes; and it is nearly as good as new. I should like you to have it, Rose, as a remembrance of past days; in fact, it ought to have been your own then by rights.’

‘Nay, I doubt not your merit gained it fairly,’ said Rose with a quiet smile.

‘I don’t remember about our merits. I dare say yours were as great as mine, but I do know that father had been a help to the school-mistress in some way just about that time, and for that reason she doubtless favoured me. But you’ll take the box, Rose; I should like to think you had it after all.’ Then she tried to hint that perhaps a prize of greater value might yet come to one who so well deserved it, but here Rose would not suffer her to proceed. So the talk was directed into other channels, and soon Harriet spoke of her children, and wondered what would become of them when she was gone, as they were too young to be left solely to a father’s care, and she had no rela-

tions to take charge of them, her parents being dead, her brothers being either unmarried or abroad, and her only sister, besides living at a great distance, being already burthened with so large a family as to make it next to impossible she would be willing to incur the trouble of two extra children. It was then Rose whispered, 'Will you trust them with me?' And was rewarded by Harriet's grateful and eager reply, 'That to no one should she feel so satisfied to trust her children as to Rose Melton.'

Matthew also expressed his approbation that Rose should, in the event of his wife's death, have the care of his children, but was afraid that it was imposing too great a charge upon her. Rose said she thought she could manage, as she was fond of children, and that, as it was such a relief to Harriet's mind, she was glad she had proposed it. Truly, hers was a noble, unselfish nature to have made such a proposition, which would involve a considerable change in Rose's manner of life. Not long after this Harriet died, her last words being, 'Rose, Matthew; Heaven bless you both,' and then expired.

As soon as Rose knew of this, and could conveniently do so, she began to look about for a cottage to dwell in, as, with the addition of two children, and also a young girl, which

it would be necessary for Rose to have to assist her, she felt she could no longer continue to reside with Mrs. Elmore. The latter did not regret this as much as she otherwise would, from the fact that, under these circumstances, she was going to live with her son, who had lately married.

The cottage in which Mrs. Melton had resided being at this time to let, Rose, with a melancholy satisfaction, once more took up her abode there, and soon the place resumed much of its former appearance. She still continued her dressmaking, though not so unremittingly, as Matthew Freeman allowed a liberal sum for the maintenance and care of his children.

As we have said, he had prospered, so far as outward circumstances were concerned, and although his ambition was not satisfied, yet most men in his position would have considered that they had done extremely well ; for, from a workman he had become a master. Before he married he had saved a sum of money, and when that event occurred he had received a good addition from Harriet's father, who had been well pleased with the marriage. With the united savings he had, after a short time, purchased a partnership in a small business at a town a few miles from Briarwood, where he and Harriet had resided. At the time she was

at Briarwood, during her last illness, he had taken furnished apartments for her, going backwards and forwards to his business. He now resided in apartments at this town, coming over to see his children now and then, at somewhat wide intervals, and in this manner more than a year and a-half had passed on since his wife's death, and Matthew appeared more restless and unhappy than when she was living. Even Rose saw something of this, though she did not know its full extent, seeing so little of Freeman.

Was it regret that he had not been kinder to his wife? Was it repentance for the past? Was it that the old love had revived for Rose Melton, but with none of the hopefulness of that former period? Perhaps it might have been all these causes combined with the fact that Matthew had at this time much good influence to bear upon him, and during the next six months a sort of change passed over his character, which Rose was quick to perceive, though she said nothing. Yes, whatever the struggle that had been going on in Matthew's mind, it seemed over; and Rose, whose love for Matthew had been, as we have said, held in abeyance, but never thoroughly destroyed, was again struggling into life, as her maturer judgment confessed, that the Matthew Freeman of the present was far more worthy of her love

than the Matthew Freeman of the past. Was she doomed to be again disappointed? or would love and joy yet crown the life of Rose Melton?

It was a warm and sunny day in the middle of summer,—the two children had gone to play in a field not very far from the cottage, the servant being with them,—thus Rose was alone,—when she was a little surprised by a visit from Matthew Freeman, he having called only a short time previously.

How peaceful that dwelling appeared to him—how everything here reminded him of the past!

Then the echo of his children's voices seemed to bring him back to the present. As he sat facing Rose, he looked so very grave and sad that after the first greetings were over, she quietly inquired whether anything was the matter.

To this Matthew replied, in a tone almost as calm,—

‘Yes; there is something the matter. I have for some time had the idea of going to America, but now I am afraid that scheme is for ever at an end, for I have a terrible suspicion that I am growing blind; and, if so, what could I do out there?’

‘Going to America!’ exclaimed Rose, on whom the first portion of this speech had made the most impression.

‘Yes; I thought the children could still have remained with you. I had placed a moderate sum in the bank, in case of accident, and I should still have sent you the usual sum. But what is the use of talking of all this now, when I shall soon, by loss of sight, be fit for nothing?’

‘Surely it is not so bad as that? Have you consulted a doctor?’

‘I have; and from the little I can gather from what he says, I have not much hope. Ah! I have not much hope about anything. Life seems to me a terrible blank now.’ And Matthew laid his head on his hand, and almost groaned as he had done in past days when he had been about to tell Rose of her lameness. Was she not avenged? Ah! she thought not of that. She only saw that the man she had loved, and, in spite of all, loved still, was in sore trouble; and her woman’s heart divined, as in past days, though now in a different way, that she was, in a great measure, the cause of his trouble. As she heard him mutter something about ‘Too late—too late now,’ she seemed to understand, as by a vision, that it was Matthew’s

ambition that had prevented his marrying her. Then she remembered Harriet's words, 'Though he was her husband, he had never loved her as he had Rose;' and now that the wife was dead, had not the old love revived?

Suddenly Rose felt as if her love for Matthew Freeman, and his love for her, bridged over the past, or it might, perhaps, be more truly said to annul it.

Timidly she limped to his side, and laid her hand gently upon his arm, as she had done long years ago. 'Matthew,' uttered Rose, in her kind, soft tone, 'Matthew.' What a deal one word sometimes expresses! Never, since the day that he had sent Rose that letter which separated them, had he heard her call him Matthew; and now how much seemed conveyed to him by that one word! It seemed to say, 'Hope, for I love you still, in spite of all that has gone.'

It was thus Matthew understood it, and he cried, 'Oh, Rose!'—in his agitation he called her by the old name—'Oh, Rose! do not mock me with hopes that can never be realised. Remember my past conduct—my present blindness. I trust you forgive—I feel you do; but let me hear you say so, and I will trouble you no more.' He gazed at her with a

troubled, anxious look, and she raised to him those sweet, loving eyes by way of answer to his question, for words at that moment seemed to fail her, only she crept a little closer to Matthew. He felt that, and said, with a sudden change of expression,—

‘May I—dare I—hope that—that the past may be blotted out? That you more than forgive; that you—that it is not too late?’

These words may seem disjointed, and not, perhaps, very intelligible to the reader, but with the look that accompanied them, they were fully understood by Rose, whose only reply, in low, loving accents, was again the one word, ‘Matthew.’

Then he knew that not only was he forgiven, but that she loved him still, and murmuring, ‘Rose, my Rose!’ he clasped her to his breast.

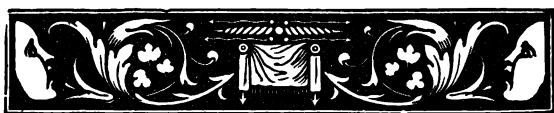
Had time gone back? Had the intervening years rolled away, as these two sat together once more in the old house—in the room, with much the same things around them, and with the summer sun making everything look bright and beautiful?

Ah! there is never any going back in life; and Rose Melton and Matthew Freeman were not the same that they had been when they sat there in years gone by. Both had suffered—Rose the most of the two; but that suffering

had, at least in Matthew's case, been productive of good results, for by it he had been led to take a truer estimate of life and its aims, and it is probable that his and Rose's future life would now be far happier than if they had married in the first flush of youth.

We think there is little more to be said. Of course, Matthew did not go to America, though he eventually recovered his eyesight. Of course, he and Rose were married, and then she went to live at the town where Matthew dwelt. It need only be said that each succeeding year seemed to bring him greater happiness and prosperity. That his children never felt the loss of their own mother, for, as Rose never had any children of her own, she bestowed on them all that love and care which was in her nature.

As to Rose, it seems as if all vie with each other in their endeavours to render her life happy, and so completely do they succeed, that it may be doubted whether she hardly remembers the sorrow of the past, or, if she does, whether it does not rather enhance than otherwise her present happiness.



NOT AS WE SEEM.



ONE of the most important places on the south coast is Southampton, anciently called Hamptune. Independently of its being one of the great stations for arrival and departure to most parts of the world, it possesses a fine town, containing many handsome public buildings and excellent shops ; while many places of interest, such as Netley Abbey, the Isle of Wight, the New Forest, etc., are in its neighbourhood.

Situated between busy, populous Southampton and the quiet village of Shirley there stood, several years ago, a pleasant and commodious house, then known as the residence of a Mr. Samuel Lewis. He was a man between fifty and sixty years of age. A widower,

with two daughters, of whom more anon, possessed of a tolerable personal appearance, and occupying a comfortable position in society. Mr. Lewis was a secretary to a large and flourishing institution, he also held some other minor appointment, and was, moreover, believed to possess considerable private property ; and, as he dwelt in a good and well-appointed house, as he and his daughters were always well dressed, and as he subscribed somewhat largely to many of the most prominent charities in the neighbourhood, this belief appeared only reasonable. On this account, and perhaps because he was very particular in his religious observances, he had been chosen as churchwarden, which post he had satisfactorily filled for the past few years.

But it is now time we spoke of his daughters. Jane and Maud Lewis, aged respectively eighteen and twenty, had, owing to their father being left a widower when they were quite young, been brought up by an aunt, away from their father's house, only seeing him occasionally ; but when Jane was eighteen, and her sister Maud nearly sixteen, they had, in consequence of the death of their aunt, returned to live entirely with their father.

They were pretty, attractive girls, and possessing rather more than the average amount

of ability, combined with good sense and kind hearts, were most likely to make what are termed 'good matches ;' at least so their father thought, and he was therefore not at all pleased to find that a sort of understanding had already sprung up between his elder daughter, Jane, and a Mr. John Ransby ; not altogether on account of the latter's position,—though even on that score he thought his daughter might do better than marry one who was engaged in wholesale trade ; but Mr. Lewis, suave in manner, and with that politeness which, like veneer, conceals whatever is beneath, disliked John Ransby, who was rough and blunt to a degree that marred his otherwise good qualities. Nevertheless, Jane liked him ; and as Mr. Lewis could not say anything tangible in reply to John Ransby's questions, 'What have you to say against me ?' or 'What objection do you urge against your daughter marrying me ?' A reluctant consent was obtained, and Jane had now been Mrs. Ransby for more than a year, and both she and her husband seemed to be leading contented and prosperous lives.

Having been somewhat disappointed in his elder daughter, Mr. Lewis seemed to turn all his thought and care on Maud. She was even prettier than her sister, and, being of a

more gentle, yielding disposition, her father had great hopes that she would prove more amenable to his wishes.

About this period Mr. Lewis became acquainted with a Mr. Harley Fenton, a man nearly fifty years of age, and of independent means. What points of attraction the sedate punctilious churchwarden found in worldly, pleasure-loving, and altogether blasé Harley Fenton, it was difficult for people to imagine; if it had been any one else, they might have said that Mr. Lewis was so flattered by the acquaintance of one in a higher position, and of greater wealth, that he overlooked his character; but this surely could not be the case with Mr. Lewis. As to Mr. Fenton, it was not difficult to believe he visited Mr. Lewis for the sake of seeing pretty, lively Maud, who, regarding him merely in the light of a casual visitor, treated him, as she did everyone, pleasantly; and on her innocent, playful manner Harley Fenton built hopes of one day being regarded in a more tender light. Was Maud Lewis, indeed, destined to be the wife of one who, though he never openly outraged the laws of society, yet was little likely to prove a fit husband for the gentle, pure-minded Maud, or to render her at all happy? And was it to be credited that

Mr. Lewis would ever consent thus to sacrifice his daughter to mere wealth and position?

Whether Maud would have yielded to persuasion and married Mr. Fenton, or whether she would have been guided by her sister's wiser counsel, it is impossible to say, if it had not been for a circumstance that occurred to her at this period, and which was destined to influence the whole of her future life. Maud Lewis was in the habit of driving about the neighbourhood, and one day when near to Bar Gate the pony took fright at a caravan or show that was passing. Maud at first tried to stop the pony, which was now going at a terrific speed, but finding her efforts useless, she had crouched in a corner of the chaise in a sort of helpless terror, scarcely conscious of holding the reins, when, just as there seemed every probability of her being overturned, the pony was stopped by a tall, good-looking, young man, who, although a gentleman, had evidently a powerful frame. When Maud had sufficiently recovered from her fright to murmur her thanks, she found her rescuer was slightly known to her by sight, being a Mr. Charles Osborne, who had lately settled in Southampton as a medical man, she therefore thankfully accepted his escort home, and from that time the young doctor had paid frequent

visits to Mr. Lewis and his daughter, and a sort of tacit understanding was growing up between them ; while Mr. Fenton was also persevering in his attentions, which had now become rather disagreeable to Maud, who had become so cold in her manner to him, that it had attracted her father's notice, and he was now saying,—

‘How was it, Maud, that you behaved so disagreeably to Mr. Fenton to-day?’

‘I could not help it, father. I did not approve of something he said, and, besides, when he is here, he follows me about so persistently, it is somewhat annoying.’

‘Annoying!’ repeated Mr. Lewis, ‘you ought to feel proud of the attentions of such a man as Harley Fenton, instead of being annoyed by them. And,’ he continued, ‘I think this is a fitting opportunity to tell you that he has asked, and received my permission, to pay his addresses to you, and I trust that you are prepared to act in accordance with my wishes.’

Maud started at this abrupt announcement, and faltered,—

‘But I—but you—father! You can never mean that I should marry this man.’

‘If “this man,” as you are pleased to call him, will have you, I certainly do intend you should marry him. Come, Maud,’ he added,

more kindly,—‘come, be reasonable, and don’t let me have to mourn a second daughter’s disobedience.’

It may be remarked here that Jane had not acted entirely against her father’s wishes, and, even if she had, Mr. Lewis did not seem to have taken it much to heart.

‘But, father,’ hesitated Maud, ‘Mr. Fenton is so different to—is so unlike—’

‘I grant,’ interrupted Mr. Lewis, ‘that Mr. Fenton does slightly differ from us in his mode of living; doubtless, greater wealth, and the position connected with it, causes this.’

‘I was not thinking of his wealth,’ returned Maud, ‘but of himself, and I cannot like him—can never marry him.’

And Maud, remembering Charles Osborne, uttered these last words with unusual firmness.

‘Hush! hush!’ said her father, in those peculiarly suave tones of his. ‘What words are these? Nothing, I know, but the utterances of a foolish girl, who does not know her own mind, and who will some day thank her father for doing his duty. Remember, Maud, we must always sacrifice everything to our duty. And now, good-night, my child, and remember that inclination must ever be sacrificed to duty.’

Mr. Lewis was fond of repeating this phrase,

though it may be doubted whether he ever practised it ; but he generally contrived to bring it in when he wanted others to sacrifice themselves to his way of thinking. Notwithstanding that he continued to use persuasions, and even threats, to his daughter, he was unable to turn the hitherto gentle and yielding Maud from her determination not to accept Mr. Fenton. At this juncture Charles Osborne asked Mr. Lewis's permission to pay his addresses to Miss Lewis, which was curtly refused, and he was requested to cease his visits.

Maud at this time was sad and depressed, but greater trouble was in store for her. Mr. Lewis, too, seemed altered in manner, appeared moody and irritable, and avoided all society—even his daughter's—and, in reply to her inquiries, said,—‘ He was not well,’ but refused to say what was the matter with him, or to call in a doctor. A sort of vague uneasiness came over Maud, and she communicated her feelings to her sister—even John Ransby was appealed to, and he replied, ‘ That doubtless something connected with business had caused annoyance to Mr. Lewis.’ Ah ! there was something connected with business that troubled Samuel Lewis to an extent undreamt of by John Ransby. He, the supposed possessor of wealth, the upright man of business, the supporter of

charities, the churchwarden of years standing, who had been so strict in his outward observance of religion, merely with the view of rendering himself more respectable in the eyes of the world, was now on the verge of ruin and disgrace.'

Mr. Lewis had for years lived beyond his means, and had made up the deficiency by systematically robbing his employers, and then falsifying the accounts. By some means suspicion had been aroused, and an inquiry was about to be instituted, which Mr. Lewis felt pretty well assured would bring all to light, and would unveil him in his true character before the world. Doubtless, it was the knowledge that the discovery of his wrong-doing might be made at any moment, that caused Mr. Lewis to be so desirous of his daughter's union with Harley Fenton. He regretted that he had been so hasty with Dr. Osborne, for it seemed to him that if his daughter had been positively engaged to either man, she would have been in a better position than she was now. Well, he supposed she would find a home with her sister, and for himself, he must go abroad : to that he had now made up his mind. On the day following the one he had formed this resolution, he looked older and more careworn than ever, and Maud, noticing this expression, said,—

‘I am sure you are ill, father, or something is troubling you. Won’t you tell me what it is?’

‘It would be no use my explaining what vexes me, Maud; you could not understand it.’

He knew this was a falsehood; he knew too well that Maud would fully have comprehended what, however, he had not the courage to tell her. Not even to his own child could he be frank and truthful. How much of that child’s sympathy he lost by his want of confidence! There was a few moments’ silence, and Samuel Lewis sighed. Thought is very rapid, and in that brief pause, perhaps, he sighed to think what a terrible sham his life had been; and it also might have been that a temporary feeling of remorse crossed his mind that he had not striven to be more really what he seemed. But he only said,—

‘I must take a journey immediately. I must leave you for a time, my dear Maud.’

‘Can I not accompany you? Do let me go with you,’ she pleaded.

‘No, child, that is impossible. Order a few things to be put up for me as quickly as possible.’

Maud obeyed her father’s request, thinking he was only going a business journey for a few days, whereas, in reality, he was about to

flee from justice to a foreign shore. The few preparations being made, that evening saw Mr. Lewis on board the night packet for France. Ah! how little Maud dreamt that when her father bade her an unusually long and affectionate farewell, that they had in reality parted for ever!

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It was nearly a month after the foregoing events, and Maud Lewis was sauntering sad and alone in the pleasant park of St. Andrew's. Far different did she appear now to when she used to drive about with her pretty pony. There was no pony carriage now, and poor Maud might be said to have no settled home. Sad as was the trouble of both daughters, it fell infinitely harder on Maud, for Jane had a home and a husband to help and support her. While Maud is walking slowly in the park, we must go back a little in our story.

When her father had been absent a day or two, Maud felt so dull that she thought she would pay her sister a visit. While there, Mr. Ransby returned rather earlier than usual. He appeared somewhat excited, and, after briefly saluting Maud, told his wife he wished to speak to her, and Jane, accompanying her husband, Maud was left alone.

When they returned, Jane, with pale face

and quivering lips, flew to her sister, and clasped her in her arms, exclaiming, 'Oh, Maud! my poor Maud! you are surely still ignorant of what has happened!'

'What is it, Jane, tell me?' and Maud's face became as pale as Jane's. While the latter hesitated, not knowing how best to disclose the truth to her sister, John Ransby was walking up and down the room, exclaiming,—

'The villain! The old hypocrite! How nicely he has deceived us all.'

The words attracted Maud's attention, and she turned from Jane to Mr. Ransby, and said, in bewildered tones,—

'What has happened, and who has deceived us all?'

'Why, that precious, canting, old swindler, your father.'

'And how dare you, Mr. Ransby, speak of my father in those terms!' replied Maud, drawing herself up proudly, and the colour flashing back to her beautiful face.

'John! John! you forget she does not know yet,' said Jane, sobbing.

Without seeming to heed his wife, John Ransby continued, 'I speak of your father as I find him, and I think you know me well enough to be aware that I am not likely to tell you anything but the truth. It has now

been discovered that your father has for some years been guilty of fraudulent practices, and a warrant for his apprehension is now out against him.'

As Maud heard this her colour again fled; and she uttered a low cry, and sinking into the chair, where, but a few minutes ago, she had been sitting so quietly, she gave way to a violent fit of weeping—Jane's tears quietly mingling with hers. We will not affirm but what there was a thought that made Maud's grief more bitter than Jane's on this sad occasion, and that was the feeling that Charles Osborne was now lost to her for ever. Jane endeavoured to console her sister as well as she was able, but she found little to say that in any way mitigated the trouble that had fallen upon them; the only thing that seemed to afford relief was the knowledge that their father was absent, but then he might return at any moment, and then, dreadful thought, be made a prisoner.

To this John Ransby replied, 'that Mr. Lewis had foreseen what was about to happen, and had taken measures accordingly, and he thought it very improbable Mr. Lewis would return.'

Then, kissing his wife, he added, 'Maud had better now remain here, and she must

for the future consider this as her home.' Then, turning to Miss Lewis, 'You must forgive what I said just now about your father, as I will promise to do all in my power to make the best of things in this disgraceful business ; but whether I say so or not, I shall always think Mr. Lewis was a canting, hypocritical, old swindler.'

'Oh, John !' remonstrated his wife, 'remember he is our father.'

'Well, well, as I can't say anything good, I will be silent.'

Maud now uttered sincere though faltering thanks to Mr. Ransby for his kindness, for she, like Jane, had discovered that though John Ransby might be rough and blunt in his manner, he had a good heart, and would often, even without mentioning it, do many a kind deed, thus being different to what he *seemed*.

He now took the sole responsibility of winding up Mr. Lewis's affairs, everything being given up to liquidate, as far as possible, his fraud ; and though Mr. Ransby would sometimes rap out a word against the father, he never in the smallest degree altered in his behaviour to his wife or her sister, now that they were the daughters of a ruined and disgraced swindler, instead of being, as was

thought, the daughters of the affluent, respectable, religious Mr. Lewis. But this is slightly anticipating, and we must now return to Maud walking in St. Andrew's Park. She took the path past the handsome statue erected to Mr. Andrews, but she did not regard it, or anything else around her. Her thoughts were occupied with recent events. She wondered where her father was, for no tidings of him had reached her or the Ransbys. Then she recalled how her father had wished her to marry Harley Fenton, and how, since their misfortune, he had shown himself in his true colours, for he had only once called since the sad truth about Mr. Lewis had become known, and that visit had been paid more from curiosity to see how the daughters, especially Maud, bore their misfortune, than from any other motive; and Maud could plainly see from his manner that he no longer desired an alliance with one who had lost all position in society. Then her thoughts flew to that other, who, she was aware, had been so summarily dismissed by her father. Where was Charles Osborne? Had he, too, ceased to love her? Had he, like too many who had made much of her in happier days, now resolved to forget there was such a person as Maud Lewis in existence? Yet that did not seem like Charles

Osborne ; and had he not said, when they had accidentally met after her father had so rudely dismissed him, that he should never forget her, and he trusted time would cause Mr. Lewis to regard him more favourably.

While Maud was endeavouring to account in some way, that should be satisfactory to herself, for the fact that Dr. Osborne had never endeavoured to see, or even to write to her since her position had altered, she heard her name uttered, and felt herself touched lightly on the arm, and, on turning round, she encountered Charles Osborne. After Maud had recovered from her momentary surprise, and slight agitation on seeing him, she said,—

‘Are you aware of the sad trouble that has fallen upon us, and that I am now residing with my sister?’

‘Yes; I know all,’ replied Dr. Osborne, in a grave and sympathising voice, ‘for I have just called on Mrs. Ransby, and from her I also learnt that you had gone to take a stroll in this park.’

Maud murmured something about feeling a wish to be out in the air, and Charles Osborne then said,—

‘I am sure, Miss Lewis—Maud—that you must have thought it strange that I have allowed so long a time to elapse under

existing circumstances without either coming or writing to you ; but I have been absent from Southampton in consequence of the sudden death of my father, and have had much to do in arranging affairs, as I have in consequence of his death succeeded to some slight property. I only mention this to show that my worldly circumstances have improved since your father and I held a certain conversation.'

To this speech Maud could only falter out, 'that their positions seemed totally reversed.'

Dr. Osborne then continued, 'May I call at your sister's to-morrow, as I have something particular to say?' Maud blushed a little as she gave the required permission. Doubtless she, like the reader, guessed the nature of that particular something Charles Osborne had to say to her, and it is almost needless to mention that the Ransbys rejoiced at her engagement with a good, honourable, right-principled man like Charles Osborne.

Soon after this, Maud received a short, scrawled note from her father, in which he stated that he was very ill—dying ; he had taken cold on his hurried journey, and this, and his distress of mind consequent on what had happened, had proved too much for him ; but he had little now to regret in leaving the world, and he concluded by begging his daugh-

ters to forgive him for the sad trouble he had brought upon them.

As it was judged impossible for either Jane or Maud to go to their father, Mr. Ransby, at their entreaty, went, but only arrived in time to witness the last moments of Samuel Lewis in the obscure French town where he had taken up his abode.

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Fourteen or fifteen years after the death of Mr. Lewis, on the gate of one of the best houses in the vicinity of Southampton might be seen a brass plate, bearing the inscription, 'Dr. Osborne, Physician and Surgeon.' Yes, Charles Osborne had prospered in life, and his wife, the now handsome Maud, again drove about the neighbourhood with a pair, instead of one pony; and this might be taken as a token of the difference that existed between Maud's present position and that she had occupied in her best days as Maud Lewis. The Osbornes were, too, not only prosperous, but happy.

At this period Dr. Osborne was called to attend a patient, who proved to be the once opulent, but now impoverished, Harley Fenton. He had, with the idea of still further increasing his wealth, embarked in several speculations, and these turning out unfortu-

nate, he was now in very reduced circumstances. Dr. and Mrs. Osborne not only assisted in restoring Mr. Fenton, in a great measure, to health, but, through their means, his position became much improved. Time, altered fortune, and illness had tended to give Harley Fenton a different view of life, and he was much struck with Mrs. Osborne's generous forgetfulness of his behaviour to her at the time of her trouble. He could but acknowledge that there was something very different in Maud and Charles Osborne to the people he had hitherto known and mixed with ; and one day, when he happened to be conversing with Dr. Osborne, he alluded to this, and also to Mr. Lewis, and said,—

‘I never met anyone before you, doctor, who appeared to be really what they *would seem*. All those whom I have hitherto known, who professed to be very good, or very religious, generally appeared to me to have something to gain by their assumption of goodness or piety. Too many, perhaps, resembled Mr. Lewis, though they did not go so far as he did. What a hypocrite and sham that man was. Of course it was impossible for me to guess about his fraud, but I did, in a great measure, see through his character, and des-

pised him ; for I consider your pretended religious man is far worse than one who, like myself, never professed anything. It seems as if the outward form of religion only tended to make a man worse.'

'No,' replied Dr. Osborne, 'it was not assuming an air of piety that made Mr. Lewis what he was, for even the most formal observance of religion will generally produce some outward correctness of life ; but it was the desire, which so many aspire to, of being thought richer, and greater, and better than he really was, that caused his terrible downfall and ruin ; but, without dwelling on his particular case, it may be said that though there may be a great deal of professing piety without any real religion in the heart, yet when it is the great regulating principle of a man's life, and not mere cant on the lip, it produces a far nobler character than any worldly maxims or philosophy can form.'

'I begin to agree with you,' replied Mr. Fenton, 'for I now comprehend that in religion, as in everything else, there is the false and the true.'

'Yes,' said Dr. Osborne, 'there is the false, which is to be shunned and despised, and the true, which is to be admired and imitated.'



GEORGE GARTON'S REVENGE.

PART I.



TELL you, Mr. Garton, I shall drain my farm as I like, whatever you or any body else may say.'

'But if you carry out this intended scheme, it will half ruin my crops, and you surely cannot wish that, Mr. Fenwick.'

'What the deuce do I care about your crops?' responded Mr. Fenwick, angrily. 'If they fail, perhaps so much the better for me. What I have got to do is to look after my own.'

'I grant,' said Mr. Garton, mildly, but firmly, 'that every man must, of necessity, take care of his own affairs, and always try and do the best he can, but we also owe a duty to our neighbours as well as to ourselves.'

'Well, I shall leave my neighbours to look

after themselves, as I don't doubt they will leave me. At all events, I don't suppose they will pay my debts for me if I go poking about their business, instead of looking after my farm.'

'You don't understand me,' replied Mr. Garton. 'I did not mean you should be a busybody; I only meant you ought, in the conduct of your affairs, to exercise a little consideration for others; as, for instance, in this drainage we have been speaking of. Surely you might do it without inflicting so much harm on myself.'

'I have told you I mean to do it in this way, and do it I will. Whether it affects your farm or not is nothing to me,' and Mr. Fenwick walked away with an air of dogged resolution that seemed to say, let the consequences be what they might, there was little probability of his relenting.

Mr. Garton and Mr. Fenwick owned adjoining farms, which their fathers had held before them; both seemed tolerably well-to-do, but Mr. Fenwick was by far the richer of the two, for not only was his the larger and better farm, but he had also a few years previously come into possession of some money which had been left him by a near relation, while Mr. Garton was totally dependent on his farm.

Three or four years before our story opens,

Bernard Fenwick and George Garton had both been in love with one Alice Graham, and she having refused Fenwick and married Garton, the former ever after seemed to bear a grudge against the latter, notwithstanding that he, Fenwick, had also married not so very long after Garton ; but having chosen somewhat hastily, his marriage was not a very happy one, and, perhaps, for this reason his enmity to George Garton, far from dying away as time went on, seemed gradually to become strengthened ; therefore he was not very likely to desist from doing anything on which he had set his mind out of regard to Garton or his welfare. And having now conceived the idea of draining his farm in such a manner that it was likely to be very detrimental to the adjoining one, he was rather pleased than otherwise, and even felt a mean gratification that he had, at last, found out a certain method whereby he might cause annoyance to his neighbour, if nothing worse. For all his previous acts of petty spite had fallen harmless on George and Alice Garton, who, blessed with health, good temper, and religious principles, were able to bear trifling troubles and vexations with equanimity ; besides, secretly, both pitied Bernard Fenwick, whom they considered far from happy ; therefore they neither

envied his greater prosperity, nor resented his ungenerous and unneighbourly conduct.

In spite of renewed remonstrance on the part of Mr. Garton, the proposed drainage was commenced, and day by day, to his vexation, he saw the work gradually progressing, which would, as he said, 'render his ground almost a swamp during any future wet seasons.'

At length the alteration was completed. Farmer Fenwick, who seemed to have been in a better temper during this business, had paid the men off that had been employed in the affair. All settled down again quietly for the present, and George Garton, with half a foreboding, and half a hope, that things might turn out better than he expected, could now only quietly wait and see the issue.

Three years passed on, and the two latter being wet ones, Garton's worst fears were realised. His farm was deluged with wet, and his crops spoiled, while he beheld his neighbour's dry and flourishing. This was hard to bear; still George Garton tried to make the best of things, and struggled hard against his adverse position, but circumstances seemed against him. The weather was very unpropitious, and his capital was too small to bear the repeated failures of his farm pro-

duce. Then his wife had a long and severe illness, which not only added to the general expense, which Garton could just then ill afford; but from the absence of the mistress there was not that economy exercised in household affairs, which would otherwise have been the case; perhaps, too, Garton, from anxiety about his wife, did not give that close and undivided attention to his farm that he would have done had Mrs. Garton been well. Thus, as we have said, at the expiration of three or four years, George Garton began to find himself in difficulties. At this period Mr. Fenwick insisted on claiming as his own a portion of his neighbour's land adjoining his, which, as it happened to be the best and most cultivated about the farm, was really the most valuable part of it; consequently Mr. Garton was not only unwilling to lose it on that account, but he considered it was not just for Mr. Fenwick to possess it. He, therefore, refused to acknowledge his claim, which so exasperated the former that he went to law about it, and though Garton could ill afford the additional expense, yet he was advised to defend his rights to the land in question. At length, after a good deal of protracted litigation, after much doubt which side would prove triumphant, the suit was brought to an end by the production of some

old deed or document by Mr. Fenwick, which ultimately decided the case in his favour.

As George Garton announced the verdict to his wife, he sank down in a chair and sighed heavily, while his countenance wore a look of unwonted care and sorrow. Mrs. Garton, who had now nearly recovered her health, tried to console him, and even endeavoured to assume an air of cheerfulness she was far from feeling ; but, in answer to her kind, soothing words, Garton said,—

‘ Oh ! Alice, you do not understand I am afraid all that this decision implies. I should not care so much if it were only myself ; but for you, Alice, it is hard ;’ and George looked at his wife with sorrowful tenderness.

‘ What do you mean, George ? Surely this law-suit can involve nothing worse than the loss of the land ; and I suppose this means a little stricter economy than we have hitherto practised ?’ said Mrs. Garton, with a slightly anxious tone of inquiry.

‘ My dear Alice, if your recent illness had not rendered you ignorant of much that was going on around you, and also prevented my telling you many things for fear of worrying you, you would scarcely have needed to ask your present question, for, alas ! we are now completely ruined.’

‘Ruined! Oh, George! you cannot mean that; even if you have been obliged to get into debt in consequence of this dreadful law business. Still, if we work hard and live carefully, things will surely come round in a little time.’

‘I am afraid not,’ replied Garton gloomily. ‘You see when we have paid the law expenses and honestly cleared our debts—if, indeed, we can do so, we shall be literally beggars.’

‘But we have still the farm to depend on,’ interrupted his wife.

‘The farm,’ replied Garton, ‘has done little more for the last two or three years than pay for the outlay upon it, and now, with the best piece of land on the place taken away, it is hardly likely to do that.’

‘Then, what must we do? Must we leave the farm?’

And Alice’s voice faltered, and her eyes filled with tears, at the thought of quitting for ever the home she loved so well.

For a moment George Garton remained silent, then, with a sort of effort he seemed to nerve himself for the task that lay before him. In answering his wife’s last question, ‘Must we leave the farm?’ he replied, ‘I fear we must—I do not see what else can be done; but, Alice, you must try and bear up bravely, or I shall never have the courage to tell you the

plan I have been thinking of ever since this law-suit seemed likely to fail.'

At these words Mrs. Garton endeavoured, not altogether without success, to struggle for composure, and her husband proceeded,—

'I know it will be a trial to you to leave the farm ; but, Alice, I want you to do something which is perhaps harder still—I want you to go abroad with me.'

'To live there always, and never see England or my friends again ? Oh ! George !'

And poor Mrs. Garton, at the prospect of the breaking up of home, and, what appeared to her, like banishment from her native country, to encounter hardships in an unknown one, fairly broke down and wept bitterly. But this indulgence of feeling was not suffered to be of long duration, as she suddenly remembered she was thus adding to her husband's present troubles, instead of aiding him to bear them ; she, therefore, restrained her tears, and though her lips still twitched a little, she endeavoured to listen calmly to George Garton's plans for the future—how the farm must be sold—how, when all was settled, he trusted still to have a sufficient sum to carry them to America ; and, when there, he hoped their energy and industry might be productive of a better result than had been the case here ;

and he wound up by saying he trusted they might some day be rich enough to come back to England, and, who knew, perhaps buy the old farm back again. Alice, who had now recovered sufficiently to smile at this bright picture of future years, now entered thoroughly into her husband's plans, though secretly she still felt a great reluctance at the idea of leaving home and country, even though it was with the man she truly loved.

Alice Garton had been, for her station, rather tenderly reared, and had never, in her whole life, been more than thirty or forty miles away from home; therefore she contemplated with a good deal of dread, which, however, she kept to herself, the idea of taking so long a journey, and, with the exception of her husband, leaving all she had ever known behind her.

Perhaps George Garton, good and kind as he was, hardly appreciated the extent of the sacrifice Alice was making, or guessed at the many little things which, in her case, added to the troubles both had at this time to bear; for, if it had not been for the sad circumstances which necessitated his leaving, George would rather have enjoyed, than otherwise, the prospect of travel and change of scene.

And now the Gartons' pleasant home was

broken up, and nearly all the things endeared to Alice by time and association passed into the hands of comparative strangers. Mr. Fenwick, it may be mentioned, was one of the purchasers, and he endeavoured to drive so hard a bargain for what he bought, and seemed so to triumph over his neighbours' misfortunes, that George Garton offered no remonstrance to his wife, when in bitterness of spirit, she exclaimed, 'That Fenwick had been the cause of all the trouble that had befallen them.'

Mr. Fenwick would also have liked to have obtained possession of the farm; but as he wanted to get it very cheaply, George Garton fortunately found another and better purchaser.

Soon the sorrowful farewells were taken with relatives and friends; and then George and Alice Garton stood on the deck of the good ship that was to bear them to another land. Quickly did it seem to them that they lost sight of the white cliffs of Old England, as the ship ploughed its way gallantly through the ocean; and when, after a few days, the Gartons had become accustomed to the motion of the ship, even Alice confessed that a sea-faring life was not wholly devoid of enjoyment. Then, with the buoyancy of youth, they began to look forward and discuss plans for the future; and by the time they reached their

journey's end, were neither sad nor desponding ; but, on the contrary, full of hope and trust in the future.

Having made a prosperous voyage, and landed safely on the shores of America, George Garton carried out a resolution previously formed of being a sheep farmer in the new country, and he and his wife therefore immediately set out for the 'Station' to which they had been directed as likely to suit them.

After much fatigue and many hardships, cheerfully borne, they were at last settled in tolerably comfortable quarters, and being well satisfied with the prospect before them, felt amply repaid for all they had previously undergone. With youth, health, and hope, combined as they were with energy, industry, and good principles, there was every reason to suppose the Gartons would prosper in life ; and, having seen them comfortably settled in a new home in a new land, we shall now take our leave of them for the present, hoping to meet with them again at a future period.

PART II.

FIFTEEN years after the events already described, an English ship had just come into port at Boston, in America, and amongst the passengers who landed was a lad of apparently about sixteen, who, not seeming to belong to anyone, or to have any particular destination in view, stood watching the various proceedings around him, until he was sharply spoken to by the captain of the vessel, who at that moment happened to observe him, and who said,—

‘Get out of the way, there. Haven’t you been bother enough all the voyage, that you must stand loitering about in everybody’s way. I suppose, now you’ve got over here, you want to be taken back again as you came, free of charge; but hang me if I do that; and if you don’t take yourself off pretty sharp, by Jove, I’ll have you taken up for unlawfully secreting yourself on my ship.’ With which threat the captain quitted him to give other orders, while the boy, for he was nothing else, whose colour had risen, but who had remained silent during this harangue, now moved quietly away; but, although he now occupied a less conspicuous position, he still

stood and watched the scene before him. All were, of course, too much occupied with their own concerns to trouble themselves about a mere boy. All, with one exception, and that was a pleasant-looking, well-dressed, middle-aged man, who appeared, like the lad, to be a mere spectator of the scene; but who, in reality, being an English settler, and having at that time business in Boston, had come down to the ship to see if there were any faces he knew, or any particular English news. Finding the passengers were all strangers, and the news of little importance or interest to him, he was turning away, when he caught the tone, but not quite the words, of the captain's sharp speech to the lad already mentioned.

As he turned to regard him, there seemed to him a look about the face as if it were not altogether a strange one, however, as he muttered to himself,—

‘It's not likely I should know him or his friends, but I will speak to him for all that; for, somehow, I don't know why, but that boy seems quite suddenly to have interested me.’ And the pleasant-looking, kind-hearted man, who, as the reader has already guessed, was our old friend George Garton, went up to the lad, and thus accosted him,—

‘I suppose you have just come off the ship, yonder?’

‘Yes, sir,’ answered the boy, a little shyly.

‘Had a good passage out?’

‘Pretty good, sir.’

‘Captain doesn’t seem a very nice sort of man, if I may judge from his manner to you just now?’

‘Oh, sir! perhaps he had reason—perhaps I deserved it,’ replied the boy, rather confusedly.

‘Ah! I see; been up to tricks, I suppose. It’s always the way with you boys.’

This was said with such a good-humoured smile, that although the lad blushed, he was not offended.

‘Do you know your face seems in some degree familiar to me?’ resumed George Garton. ‘Yet I don’t suppose I ever knew any one belonging to you.’

‘It is hardly likely,’ replied the boy, and he gave a slight sigh.

‘Would you mind telling me from what part of England you came?’

The lad hesitated for a moment, and then said,—

‘From Fairfield, in the county of Hampshire.’

‘Ah! that is quite an unknown place to me,’ said Mr. Garton, in a slightly disappointed tone, for he had, until that moment, had a sort of

floating idea in his mind that perhaps, in by-gone years, he might have known some one connected with this lad which would account for his face being familiar; but his answer to the last question put an end to this idea. Then, with a careless nod, he left him, supposing the lad, who appeared respectable, would soon be either met by some one or joined by his friends. But happening to pass by the same spot an hour or two afterwards, he saw the boy standing in nearly the same place. This struck George Garton as rather curious, and he said,—

‘So you’ve not been joined by your friends yet?’

‘Friends, sir!’ echoed the lad. ‘I have no friends—at least, not here. The few I had are all left behind in England.’

‘Why, you don’t mean to say you have come over here without knowing anybody, and by yourself, too?’ and Mr. Garton gave a somewhat keen and scrutinising glance.

The lad seemed again rather confused, as he replied,—

‘Yes, sir, I have.’

‘Then,’ answered Mr. Garton, ‘I am afraid there is something not quite right. You have run away from home and friends. Is it not so?’

The lad hung his head, coloured, but gave no reply.

‘Come, tell me ; am I not right ?’

An affirmation being at last given to this last question, in a very low tone, Mr. Garton resumed,—

‘Now, you must have known, my lad, it was very wrong to do this—to give all this needless sorrow and anxiety to your friends. Of course, I don’t know what prompted you to do it, but, under any circumstances, I repeat, it was very wrong.’

Mr. Garton’s tone was grave, but not unkind, and this, perhaps, prompted the lad to say,—

‘Well, I acknowledge it was not right ; but, oh, sir, I was so miserable at school, and I have always had such a desire to go to sea, though I find it is not so nice as I thought it would be,’ he added, with boyish frankness.

‘I can quite believe that,’ responded Mr. Garton ; ‘and, as you seem sensible of the folly of your conduct, and are, I hope, willing now to do what is right, I do not like the idea of leaving you, young as you are, until I see that you are in safe and proper hands.’

‘It is very kind of you, sir, to take this interest in one who is a total stranger to you.’ And the boy looked at George Garton gratefully.

He was then desired to follow him, and was soon in a comfortable room, with a good and plentiful meal spread before him, to which the lad did such justice that Garton believed, and with truth, that it must have been many hours since he had tasted food ; but which, to the boy's credit, he would not touch until he had informed his benefactor that he was absolutely penniless, having spent his last shilling on board the ship.

When the meal had been despatched, 'George Garton then said,—

'As I am willing to befriend you, you must now confide in me who your friends are, and how you came to leave them ; and then, if necessary, I will lend you a sufficient sum of money to return, which I trust to your honour to repay,' and Garton smiled.

'Oh ! sir, must I go back again ?' said the boy with a look of dismay.

'You must first tell me all the circumstances, and then I shall be better able to judge,' was the reply.

The lad then said,—

'I ran away from school because the master, who was a very severe man, had flogged me unmercifully for telling what he believed a falsehood, but which was really the truth. I felt I dared not return to my father. Had my

poor mother been living, I think I might have done so, but she died when I was eleven years old, and my sister, who is more than five years older than myself, is married ; so that I felt I dared not face my father alone, and as I had then a little money in my possession, and had, as I have told you, a great longing to go to sea, to which, I knew, my father would never give his consent, I managed to make my way to Stonecliffe, which was only a few miles distant, and then, by dodging about, I contrived, unseen, to secrete myself on the vessel at the last moment. When the captain found me out, he went into a terrible rage, and threatened to put me in irons.'

'Ah ! I believe that was only a threat,' interrupted Mr. Garton.

'Perhaps so, sir, but I can tell you it frightened me terribly. However, the captain was not so bad after all, for he let me have enough to eat, though he made me do many a rough job about the ship.'

'And did you never think what you would do when you got over here ?'

'No, sir, I thought I should get along somehow ; though I will own that when you last spoke to me I was beginning to feel very lonely and hungry, and if you had not been kind

enough, sir, to take pity on me, I think I should have been forced to beg of the passers by.'

'I hope you will never be obliged to come to that,' said Mr. Garton with a slight smile.

'I hope not, sir.'

Then there was silence for a few moments, and again George Garton caught the look on the face before him which appeared familiar, which seemed to remind him of some one he had formerly known, though he could not at that instant recall to mind anyone whom the lad at all resembled. At last he said,—

'Did you tell me the truth when you said you came, from Fairfield in Hampshire?'

'Yes, that was the name of the place where I was at school, but my home is at Burnside, in Shropshire.'

'At Burnside! What then is your name?'

said George Garton, eagerly.

'Bernard Fenwick.'

As the lad pronounced these words, Garton uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and then was silent.

At that moment, the past fifteen years, with their joys and their sorrows, faded away from his mind, and he seemed to behold again the quiet country village of his boyhood and early manhood—the old house that had been so cherished—then he thought how he and

this boy's father had both wooed the pretty Alice, and how Fenwick had ever after borne a grudge against him. Then he remembered the affair of the drainage, and the lawsuit, and how gradually by these means he, Garton, had been ruined, and how, in consequence, both he and his wife had been obliged to leave their native land, and to endure severe hardships and trials. True, he was prosperous now ; but that was owing to his own and Alice Garton's energy and industry, and not to anything Mr. Fenwick had done. Nay, he fully believed that, had it been possible, this same Mr. Fenwick would have hindered his progress in the new land to which he had gone.

And now this man's only son was in a great measure in his power.

What should he now do ? How should he act ? Should he cast off the boy to whom he had been so singularly drawn, and, giving him a dollar or so, wherewith to get a night's lodging, tell him he could do no more for him. But then, was not this like punishing the innocent for the guilty. What had young Bernard Fenwick done to him that he should thus suffer for the sins of his father.

Then another idea presented itself. Why should he not keep the boy, on the condition that he should never betray to his friends

that he, Bernard Fenwick, was even living. It would surely not be difficult to persuade him to this. While, what a revenge it would be on the father, thus to deprive him of his only son,—a son of whom he was most likely proud, though he did not appear to have shown him any great indulgence, but whose loss he would probably deeply deplore.

While George Garton was wavering on this point, young Fenwick ventured to break the silence by saying,—

‘Did you ever know my parents, sir?’

‘Yes, many years ago, before you were born. But I remember your sister, a little toddling thing, about the farm.’

And George Garton remembered too, though he did not say so, how that was the only possession which they had envied Mr. Fenwick; but that, too, had passed away, for they had now two bonny boys of their own.

‘My sister Fanny is now nearly one-and-twenty, and I have just turned fifteen.’

‘And don’t you wish to go back to this sister?’ inquired Garton.

‘I would rather not go back to England, if I could help it,’ replied the boy respectfully, yet firmly; ‘but I should like Fanny to know I am here.’

Simple words, yet they roused a better

feeling in George Garton's heart. He also remembered, too, the advice of an old Book, 'Do unto others as you would that men should do unto you.' And he felt if he acted as he proposed to himself, how little he should be carrying out this precept ; for if, in future years, one of his own sons were to act like young Bernard Fenwick, should he not wish, not only that he should be aided, but that he should also hear of his destination and welfare.

Having now made up his mind to the course he would take, he told young Fenwick that he must, without delay, acquaint his father with the particulars of his absconding from school, his secreting himself on ship-board, and his safe arrival in America, and that he might also add, that he was in good hands, and would be taken care of until his father's wishes were known, whether he should remain where he was, or return to England. Mr. Garton then communicated his name to young Fenwick, but requested that neither it nor the fact that he had ever had the slightest acquaintance with the father should transpire in Bernard's letter home.

This letter, and one to his sister Fanny, having been despatched, and George Garton having terminated the business for which he came to Boston, and, having signified to Ber-

nard Fenwick his intention to take him to his, Garton's home, until the lad should have time to hear from his father, they then proceeded on their journey to that destination.

When they arrived there, and Mrs. Garton heard from her husband who their guest was, she was much surprised; but she offered no objection to Bernard's remaining.

In due time the latter received answers to his two letters; that from his sister was an affectionate one, though she gently reproached him for having caused much trouble and sorrow, yet she concluded by saying that, as it seemed to be his wish to stay in America, she had pleaded with her father—and she believed not altogether unsuccessfully—to allow him to remain, and exhorted Bernard so to conduct himself, that she might not in the future have cause to regret persuading her father to this decision.

The father's letter was not so kind as the sister's. He reproached his son severely for his conduct, and said, as Bernard had chosen to run away from home, he would richly have deserved to have been left to starve. However, as he, the elder Fenwick, did not altogether wish that, he had sent a sum of money to defray expenses. As to returning, Bernard might do as he liked about that; he,

his father, had no objections to his remaining for a time, if he liked, especially as he seemed to have found some one to look after him. That, under any circumstances, he, Bernard, would shortly have left school; and, as it was likely in the future he would have the management of the farm at Burnside, it might be as well, previous to doing so, that he should see a little of the world, and that, as he had chosen to go to America, he might try, while he was there, to learn something of the method of farming over there. This letter concluded by a caution to Bernard to take care of his money, though more would be sent at a proper interval; and that, whenever he felt tired of the life where he was, there would always be a home and a welcome for him in England.

Bernard, now being free to choose for himself, decided on remaining where he was; first, however, asking Mr. and Mrs. Garton whether they were willing for him to continue to live with them, offering at the same time all the money his father had sent. Mr. and Mrs. Garton replied that they were perfectly willing that Bernard Fenwick should remain, but absolutely refused to touch a farthing of the money thus offered, and though Bernard urged it several times, they still refused; and

at last Mr. Garton said, that this money should be put away until such time as Bernard should seem to require it, and to this decision the lad, rather against his will, was forced to accede.

He now became thoroughly at home with, and entered into all the employments of the Gartons, and in each succeeding letter home related of his increased pleasure and happiness in the life he was leading; and in praise of his kind friends, whose name, however, he never betrayed, having received an injunction more than once from Mr. Garton not to do so; and though Bernard thought this strange, yet as it was one of the few commands that Mr. Garton laid upon him, he felt unwilling to disobey him, and it so happened that neither father nor sister thought of asking the name of his new found friends; their letters, which were not very frequent, being principally occupied with home news.

In the pleasant and happy home of the Gartons did Bernard Fenwick spend the next three or four years of his life, and then a change occurred, which shall be told in the following and concluding portion of this story.

PART III.

BERNARD FENWICK was now more than twenty years of age, and for the last year or two he had received no money from his father. As well as he could make out, from the hints dropped in the letters sent to him, things did not seem going on very prosperously at his old home. This he acknowledged to Mr. Garton, who said,—

‘As I know from my own experience that no one can tell what may happen, or how soon they may be reduced from comfort to poverty, I now ask you, as you are nearly twenty-one, whether you would not prefer to be earning your own living, entirely independent of me?’

‘I should, indeed, and I have thought about it several times, lately; but I was afraid you might think me ungrateful for all your great kindness, Mr. Garton, if I proposed leaving you, especially as you are pleased to say I am some help to you.’

‘You are, indeed, a great assistance; but I must not, for my own selfish ends, keep you from progressing in life.’

It is very good of you to say so. Ah! how different might have been my lot in life,

if it had not been for your and Mrs. Garton's kindness.'

Different, indeed! Had Bernard Fenwick not met Mr. Garton that eventful day he landed, who can say what might have become of him. If he had even remained at home it was far from likely that he would have grown into the strong, brave, truthful, noble-hearted young fellow he had become, owing to the good and judicious influence he had received at a critical period of his life.

In reply to his last speech, Mr. Garton said,—

'More is due to Mrs. Garton in this respect than to me—her thought and care for everyone is unceasing. What I should have done without her in the earlier portion of my life, I know not. I only pray, boy, that if ever you have a wife, you may find one as good as Alice Garton.'

'Oh, I am afraid there are not many Mrs. Gartons in the world, sir.'

'Well, don't fall in love with my wife,' said Mr. Garton, laughing, in which laugh Bernard joined.

'But now,' resumed Mr. Garton, 'to return to the business of which we were speaking. I was thinking you might set up for a farmer on your own account, if you liked.'

'How could I do that?' inquired Bernard.

‘Why, you know, there is that money sent you from time to time by your father, which now amounts to more than five hundred dollars.’

‘As much as that?’ said Bernard, in rather a surprised tone.

‘Yes; and I will lend you another five hundred—that will make a thousand—and as land is plentiful and cheap here, I think you might manage to start with that capital, especially as you can have many things from my farm to stock your place with; and if you happen to be prosperous and are economical, I have little doubt in a year or two you will be able to clear off the debt.’

‘I don’t know how to thank you enough, Mr. Garton, for your kind offer, which will enable me to accomplish what has been for some time past my greatest wish—the having land of my own—and I can assure you I will never rest until I have repaid every farthing that you are good enough to lend me; but I shall ever owe you a debt of gratitude.’

Mrs. Garton entered at this juncture, and when she heard of her husband’s proposal, she said,—

‘Why, you are never going to let that boy manage a farm by himself?’

‘Come, come; Bernard will never admire you as he does if you call him that,’ said Mr.

Garton, merrily ; apparently forgetful that he had only a few moments ago addressed Bernard thus.

Mrs. Garton smiled, but again reiterated her objection to Bernard leaving them.

‘As to that, my dear,’ replied Mr. Garton, ‘I suppose we could not expect to keep him here always, and I think there is a good opening for him now, as he might have the land that lies next to ours, so that we shall be able sometimes to know how he is getting on. Then he can have James Whitby and his wife to keep house for him. I, like you, should not like him to go without some one to look after him, that we can depend on.’

‘Well, if he is to have James and Mary Whitby, I don’t mind so much ; and he had better have Peter Maccabe to look after the farm for him. I think it is a pity he did not wait until he was a little older before taking so much responsibility on himself.’

But Bernard and Mr. Garton judged otherwise. Bernard, from the natural desire of a young man to push his fortune in life ; but Mr. Garton, because, from what he had heard, he considered that in time young Fenwick might be glad to have a home to offer his father ; at all events, as he told him, it would give him a start in life, and if he eventually found it necessary

to go back to England, he would always be able to dispose of the land he had thus acquired. Of course, many conversations ensued, and many difficulties had to be overcome before Bernard Fenwick settled in his new home. Nor was it likely that he would ever have become possessed of it, had it not been for Mr. Garton's generous kindness in lending him the additional sum required for its purchase. For the elder Mr. Fenwick's affairs had now got into that state, that he seemed to have no money to spare for anybody or anything.

We shall, perhaps, derive some idea how Mr. Fenwick, who had once appeared so rich and prosperous, had fallen into difficulties, and what was the final result, if we take a few extracts from some of his letters to his son during the previous and two following years.

'I don't know how it is, but things do not seem to have prospered with me of late. The money I have sunk in the farm has been enormous, considering the little return it has made.' . . .

'I find Mr. Grant' (this was the man who had purchased Garton's farm) 'a most litigious man, he has gone to law about that piece of land that I had a law-suit about years ago. I hope I shall be successful, and that he will have to pay the costs.' . . .

‘That old curmudgeon Grant has gained the day, there having been pronounced a flaw in the document by which I formerly won the cause, so I have got to pay all the costs of the suit.’ . . .

‘I have been persuaded by Grasper—the lawyer I employed—to invest a tolerable sum in a mining speculation ; he says, and rightly, that no money is to be made in these days in farming.’

There now ensued a rather longer interval than usual in the arrival of Mr. Fenwick’s next letter, and when he again wrote it was as follows :—

‘That fellow Grant has so continued the drainage through his farm, that while his crops are flourishing, mine, owing to the late dry season, are perishing for want of moisture. Something ought to be done, but I can’t afford to lay out any more money just now.’ . . .

‘I am sorry to say I am unable to send you your allowance this time. Things are anything but prosperous with the farm, and I have had to sink more money in the mines ; however, Grasper assures me that when they do begin to work they will yield an enormous return.’

Something in this strain wrote Mr. Fenwick in the next letter or two ; then he became more desponding, and finally, when

Bernard was three-and-twenty, and when he had paid two-thirds of the debt he owed Mr. Garton, and seemed in a fair way to pay the remainder, having as George Garton had believed, prospered in his undertaking, he received a letter from his father, for which he was in some measure prepared, by a previous one from his sister, a portion of it was as follows:—

‘The mine has proved a complete failure. That rascal Grasper has, I believe, known it for some time, and only kept up appearances to get money out of me, with which he has decamped. I don’t know yet the full extent of my liabilities, but I feel certain I am a ruined man. This is a bitter thing, especially at my time of life, when I cannot hope to retrieve my fortune. And what makes it even harder to bear, is, that I feel as if it were in some sort a retribution for my conduct in former years, for, I believe, that I was in a great measure the ruin of another man.’

Here Mr. Fenwick gave some account of his dealings with George Garton, and how the latter had been compelled to sell his home and go abroad, and how he feared he, Fenwick, must now endure something of the same fate.

When Bernard read the name of George Garton, he guessed that his friend and bene-

factor was the person alluded to, and, showing this letter to Mr. Garton, he inquired if his surmise were not correct. Garton replied in the affirmative, and then gave young Fenwick fuller details than had been afforded by his father.

Bernard now suggested that he thought of asking his father to come over to America—and this suggestion Mr. and Mrs. Garton approved. So Bernard immediately despatched an answer to the elder Fenwick's letter, and after duly sympathising with his troubles and losses, invited him to join him over there, concluding by saying,—

‘I hope you will not refuse to come, father, for your presence and assistance would now be a great help and comfort to me, and I can ensure you a comfortable home and a hearty welcome in the New World, where I trust to see you in safety before very long.’

It may be here mentioned that Bernard accompanied this letter with a sufficient sum to defray the expenses of Mr. Fenwick's proposed voyage. How little would he have been in a position to have done all this if it had not been for George Garton's noble forgetfulness of the father's injuries, and kindness and interest in the son.

To Bernard's proposal Mr. Fenwick con-

sented, and his affairs having been wound up, he started on the same voyage as George Garton had done years before, and in even a worse condition, for he had not the youth and hope, the love and companionship that had lightened Garton's trial, and which enabled him now to look back on that period with no bitterness, and scarcely even a regret.

Again a ship was in the port of Boston—and again Bernard Fenwick might be said to be almost a spectator of the scene. Yet what a difference there was between the boy who had been cast like a waif on the vast shores of America, and the tall, strong, self-reliant, happy-looking young man who now stood waiting to receive and welcome his father. And now the father and son, separated for eight years, have met, and Bernard is surprised and shocked to see how old and broken-down his father seems; while Mr. Fenwick is well satisfied and pleased with the appearance and manner of his son. Then Bernard, though with a very different companion, again traversed the road that he had been taken by Mr. Garton when he first made his acquaintance. Having arrived at their journey's end, Mr. Fenwick was surprised, and also pleased, with the home to which his

son had conducted him, and which was so much better than he had been led to expect ; and it was not without a certain pride, as well as pleasure, that Bernard explained to his father his present position ; and Mr. Fenwick acknowledged, with a smile for Bernard, and a sigh for himself, that, as his fortune had gradually dwindled, and finally come to nothing, by his haste to be rich, so Bernard had gradually improved his, by hard work and steady perseverance.

About a week after Mr. Fenwick arrived, he desired Bernard to take him to see the kind friend who had assisted him. Bernard did so, still contriving to conceal the name of Garton, merely saying, when they encountered Mr. Garton, 'This is my father, sir ; he wishes to thank you himself for all your kindness to me.'

And now the two men stood face to face, after long years !

George Garton, without the previous introduction, would have recognised Mr. Fenwick, though he was surprised to see how the years had told upon him ; for, with hair thin, and almost white—with an enfeebled and drooping figure—Bernard Fenwick began to seem like an old man. He was, too, very different in manner from when Garton had formerly

known him—his spirit being now broken, and his temper much curbed. Perhaps adversity had not been without some useful lessons to him. He, on his part, did not recognise George Garton—the man whom he once considered his enemy, and treated as such. Garton—bronzed and bearded as he was—looked several years younger than Fenwick, notwithstanding his face bore some marks of care, and his hair threads of grey. As he merely bowed in answer to young Fenwick's speech, the latter said,—

‘I have heard much from my son of your great kindness and interest in him. Few, I am sure, would have behaved as you have done. I can only express my deep gratitude for the way in which you have acted towards him.’

And Mr. Fenwick held out his hand to George Garton, but, to his surprise, and also to Bernard's, the latter refused to shake hands, saying,—

‘Before I do that, Mr. Fenwick, I must have a few words with you.’

Mr. Fenwick looked inquiringly, but remained silent.

‘Many years ago now, you and one George Garton were both suitors to one Alice Graham.’

‘How do you know this?’ inquired Mr. Fenwick with astonishment.

‘Never mind how I know it, the fact remains the same. Ever after that you bore a grudge against this George Garton. You tried to ruin him, and you at last succeeded in doing it—at least for a time; for he went to America, and ever after prospered in life. Many years after he encountered the son of the man who had caused his ruin, and—’

‘George Garton! Is it, indeed, George Garton that I behold?’ interrupted Mr. Fenwick.

‘It is,’ replied Garton. ‘Will you, now that you know who I am, shake hands with me? Are you willing, as I am, that by-gones shall be by-gones, and that for the future we shall be friends?’

‘Yes, a thousand times yes!’ replied Mr. Fenwick, much overcome by Garton’s generous behaviour. Then the two men’s hands met in the warm grip of friendship, and with that grasp died out every trace of Fenwick’s former animosity to George Garton.

After a moment’s silence, Bernard at length said,—

‘You must forgive me, father, that I concealed Mr. Garton’s name from you. It was at his earnest wish that I did so.’

‘Perhaps it was from a whim, or from a sort of feeling that I did not wish you to know I

was the one to whom your son was indebted. However, you will pardon it, Mr. Fenwick,' said Garton.

'I am so much happier now than I ever thought I should be—than I feel I deserve to be—that I am not disposed to quarrel with anybody or anything. Ah, Garton! you are amply avenged; for while you are a prosperous man, I am a beggar, and should probably be now without a shelter if it were not for my son's affording me a home in my hour of trial, which home, I find, he, in a great measure, owes to you, besides many other things which I can't speak of now.'

Mr. Fenwick's voice faltered as he thought how George Garton had repaid all his evil with good. But Mr. Garton replied,—

'Do not speak further on this subject. If there was anything unusual in my conduct in befriending your son, I have been amply repaid by his affection to us all, and his good and steady conduct.'

Here a kindly look was interchanged between Bernard and Mr. Garton, who continued,—

'And the only revenge I desire to take for the past is to aid him in his efforts to render your declining days comfortable, and to secure his welfare in the future.'

Doubtless, Mr. Garton was right. At all

events, he had lost an enemy, and gained instead two real life-long friends, by having befriended that enemy's son, and thus exercising a 'Generous Revenge.'





CLARA HORNBY'S SECRET.



R. and MRS. HORNBY were on their wedding-tour, having been married exactly one week. Mr. Hornby was between five and six-and-thirty, tall and handsome, and occupying a good position in what may be termed the upper middle-class of society. Mrs. Hornby was about four or five-and-twenty, about the middle height, had good features, a pair of bright blue eyes, wavy light hair, a delicate complexion, and a graceful figure.

Mr. and Mrs. Hornby were, as we have said, on their wedding-tour, consequently the lover-like attention had not yet had time to disappear, neither had they had time to study each other's character. Each believed the other had married purely from

love ; and, on Mr. Hornby's part, there seemed no reason why this should not be the case, as the trifling portion Mrs. Hornby—*née* Clara Wilby—had brought on her marriage would not, in Mr. Hornby's circumstances, have been much, if any consideration, to him. With Mrs. Hornby the case was different, she having been left an orphan at an early age, and having been brought up by a maiden aunt. Had the personal attractions of Arthur Hornby, or his superior position induced her either to marry him too hastily or without that affection which a woman should feel towards the man she takes for her husband ? If so, surely Clara Hornby with her attractive appearance would be exposed to temptation. If she really loved her husband, why did she almost seem to shrink from his caresses ? Why did her countenance become sometimes suddenly grave, and more especially when Mr. Hornby would express some of those loving compliments, so natural under the circumstances ? Why did she sometimes say to herself, 'Why did I not avow it before marriage ? Why am I so foolish as not to tell him now ? Surely I cannot by this forfeit his love. I will tell him.' But when she was on the brink of making her confession, some remarks of Mr. Hornby would make her think. 'I cannot

tell him just now ; perhaps presently I shall have a better opportunity.' But the better opportunity seemed slow to arrive. Why would she sometimes, after this thought, steal away from her husband, retire to her bed-chamber, lock the door, and draw down the blind ? Did she, even in those early days of wedded life, regret the loss of her freedom, or had another won her heart previous to her marriage ; and did she love that other still ? This seemed hardly likely, for she would scarcely have avowed such a secret to her husband ; it was more probable that she had had some previous engagement or attachment, which she now considered it would have been wiser to have confessed to Arthur Hornby, rather than run the risk of his learning it any other way,

Once or twice, when she had been thus locked in, her husband had come to seek her, and it may be supposed that it was to regain her composure that she allowed of a slight delay before admitting him, and that she would murmur something about the necessity of locking your chamber door in an hotel ; and Mr. Hornby agreed in this, and enumerated some amusing anecdotes about people finding their way to the wrong rooms.

So the weeks passed on, and Mr. and Mrs.

Hornby, having completed their tour, went to dwell in their own pleasant and luxurious residence. Everything here seemed to be arranged to conduce to the happiness of Clara Hornby, and yet—yet there seemed at times a slight cloud, or depression, or gravity over her, which, though frequent, was of short duration. Perhaps she was beginning to love her husband; if so, why did she not confide her secret, whatever it was, to him, trusting to his honour and affection?

At this period a circumstance occurred which seemed likely to rouse a train of thought in Arthur Hornby's mind, inimical to his own and Clara's happiness. It was in this way: Mr. and Mrs. Hornby were present at a very large party, and during the evening, as he was standing behind some shrubs in a conservatory, where he had gone for a little cooler air, he chanced to hear the following conversation:—

‘Are Mr. and Mrs. Hornby here to-night?’

‘Yes. Have you not seen them? She has on a pale blue silk and splendid ornaments, and really looks very handsome.’

‘What sort of a man is her husband, for I don't know him?’

‘Oh! tall, dark, and good-looking.’ Then with a glance towards the ball-room, ‘I do

not see him just now, or I would point him out to you.'

'Do you think it was, as the French say, a *mariage de convenance*—I mean, on Mrs. Hornby's part?'

'No. Why? Mr. Hornby is a man that surely might inspire a woman with affection.'

'I should hope so,' murmured this same Mr. Hornby under his breath, who now, that he found the conversation had assumed a personal nature, would have been glad to make his escape, but did not see how he was to do so without betraying that he had already heard the foregoing remarks; besides, it must be confessed that he was a little curious to hear the answer as to why he should have been married from other motives than affection, and so remained still while the other speaker replied,—

'Mr. Hornby may be quite capable of inspiring a woman with affection—that I grant. The only thing I demur at is, that he should have done so with regard to Clara Wilby, otherwise Mrs. Hornby.'

'And why should she prove an exception?' returned the other.

Mr. Hornby waited almost breathlessly for the reply.

'Because,' resumed the first speaker, 'I

always thought that Miss Wilby would have married Frank Vincent. I know he visited much at her aunt's, and I fancied there was some kind of engagement between them; of course, he was nothing like so well off as Hornby.'

'Then, perhaps the lady in question thought she might do better than marry this Mr. Vincent.'

'Very likely,' returned the other, and then they both laughed, and being now joined by a third person, they soon after quitted the conservatory, and Mr. Hornby was left alone.

What were his thoughts at hearing this conversation concerning himself and his wife? At hearing that which could not be pleasant for a man to hear at any time, least of all for a newly-married man like Mr. Hornby. What were his thoughts? Well, they were neither very bitter nor very sad. His was not a suspicious nature, and he felt rather amused than otherwise at what he had overheard, merely considering it a piece of scandal, and feeling sure that his wife was the last person in the world to have married him from such merely mercenary motives as had just been ascribed to her.

Ah! Mr. Hornby, you laughed at them then,

but the period came that you remembered them !

For, gradually, as time stole on, a sort of feeling began to dawn on Mr. Hornby's mind that his wife was not quite happy. He could not have stated precisely when this conviction had stolen into his mind, nor why ; he only knew it was there, and that he could not get rid of it. Once he asked Clara if she was not happy, and inquired if there was anything he could do to make her more so ; and she, with some slight surprise in her manner, had replied that he could not, and that she was sure if any woman ought to be happy, she ought to be, that if she had any fear, it was the fear of losing his love ; and Mr. Hornby, drawing her to him and kissing her, said that was a foolish fear.

‘It may be,’ replied Mrs. Hornby, ‘yet when I tell you—’

But here a visitor was announced, and whatever Clara had been about to say to her husband, was for ever left a mystery. Was she about to disclose some secret or trouble connected with her past life ? If so, what a pity that the sudden entrance of a third person hindered this intended confidence between husband and wife. For Mr. Hornby was right. Clara was not perfectly

happy—did not seem to possess that gaiety of manner that should have characterised her under the circumstances. Then, at intervals, she would still lock herself in her chamber, as she had done at the hotel; and though Mr. Hornby made little or no remark on this, still he thought it very odd.

One afternoon when he had demanded admittance, and had, after a slight delay usual on these occasions, been let in, he saw, or fancied he saw, that Mrs. Hornby had been crying; he taxed her with the fact, and she half admitted it, saying, as an excuse, 'That she was not well—had a headache;' and Mr. Hornby, with much kindness of manner, entreated her to lie down, saying, 'There was nothing like rest and quiet.' Clara assented, and saying she would try to sleep, was again left alone. But when alone, sleep or rest of any kind seemed far from Clara Hornby, as she turned restlessly from side to side and muttered, 'Oh! that I could tell him all—that I had never concealed it—that I could avow this wretched secret which clouds all my enjoyment. Will it ever be so? Shall I never have courage to tell him? Oh, Arthur! if you knew what I have suffered, I think you would forgive me.'

It was about a week after this that Mr.

Hornby heard the name of Vincent accidentally mentioned, and learnt that a gentleman of that name had come to reside for a time in his neighbourhood.

The name of Vincent at once brought back to his mind the conversation he had overheard at the party; but he was not disposed to treat it so lightly now as he did then. He was beginning to be afraid there was, perhaps, a slight foundation in what was said at that time. He now determined to ask his wife about this Mr. Vincent, so he began—

‘Clara did you once know a Mr. Vincent?’

‘Yes. Why do you ask?’ she replied with a slight confusion of manner.

‘Because he has just come to reside in this neighbourhood.’

Clara started, and Mr. Hornby thought she changed colour. He waited in silence, hoping Clara would say something that would tend to dispel the unpleasant suspicion that now forced itself upon his mind; but Clara remained silent for some few minutes, and when she again spoke it was upon an indifferent matter, and Mr. Hornby felt as if this were a sort of tacit avowal that the subject of Mr. Vincent, and her knowledge of him, was one that she did not wish to discuss, and he pressed her no further—asked

her no more questions ; but he was neither pleased nor satisfied ; and Clara confessed to herself afterwards that it would have been far better if, at this juncture, she had been frank with her husband.

What was it that prevented Clara Hornby from being perfectly ingenuous with her husband ? Had she deceived him ? or was it not probable she was deceiving him still ? Was there some truth in that conversation Mr. Hornby had accidentally overheard ? He soon began to think there was, and time tended to strengthen this conviction. Gradually, from thinking that his wife had been tempted to marry him for his superior fortune, he came to the belief that she disliked him—that she bitterly regretted her marriage—more especially as this Mr. Vincent, who, doubtless, was the one she truly loved, appeared to have grown suddenly rich.

Possessed with this idea, the once pleasant and happy Arthur Hornby grew moody and irritable, and avoided his home as much as possible. As to poor Clara, she felt very miserable ; but no thought of being frank with her husband entered her mind now, though she would sometimes exclaim to herself,—

‘ Can he suspect ? Surely not. And yet, why is he so changed ? Ah ! if I had only

been frank before marriage, then I should have nothing to reproach myself with.'

Thus Mr. and Mrs. Hornby grew day by day more estranged from each other. All trust and confidence destroyed between them, Mr. Hornby endeavouring to conceal that he now thought his marriage a mistake, and that he had been sadly deceived in his wife. And Mrs. Hornby, was not she concealing from her husband a secret of more dread importance?

One afternoon, when Mr. Hornby was looking for something he wanted, he accidentally upset his wife's work-basket, and, while replacing the things, he came across a small piece of paper twisted up, and his eye caught the following letters—V-i-n-c-e. At once he tore it open, and read the following lines:—

'If you keep—you know what—a secret, Vincent assures me it can never be detected. Why let it be any trouble to you? Even if the worst should happen; why, then, you must—'

But here the paper was torn off. Mr. Hornby crushed it in his hand as he finished reading what seemed a confirmation of his suspicions, that his wife had married him, while, all the time loving Frank Vincent. And was this all?

Then there flashed upon him the words he had heard at the party, and the laugh that

had accompanied them. Then he thought of his wife locking herself in her chamber at intervals. 'Doubtless,' he groaned, 'it is for the purpose,' and he glanced again at the torn note. 'Doubtless it is to correspond with this Vincent, and, good heavens! the aunt seems conniving at it. Never did I imagine such baseness, such treachery, could be exercised towards myself.' And then, we are sorry to say, Mr. Hornby swore at all three—at his wife for imperilling his honour; at Vincent for being a villain; and at the aunt for her guilty connivance. Then he looked again at the important piece of paper, 'What was the secret that would never be detected?—of course by him, Arthur Hornby'—he muttered to himself, and glancing at the last words, 'Then you must,' he continued. 'What is it she must do if the worst comes? Ah! I see it all, the worst means, if I discover this clandestine correspondence between my wife and this villain Vincent, then she must leave me, and fly to his protection.'

As he came to this conclusion, contending feelings overmastered him, and sinking into a chair, Arthur Hornby covered his face with his hands, then the words broke from him,

'Clara, Clara! I did not think you would have treated me thus.'

Then there swept over him the remembrance of the days when he wooed her. Of their honeymoon and commencement of wedded life in their present home, and how he had looked forward to continued happiness. How had his hopes been frustrated! 'What should he do?' he ground between his teeth, as the present loomed darkly before him. 'Should he fight a duel with this Vincent? No. Duels were out of date now, besides being criminal. If he even horse-whipped him, he, the proud Arthur Hornby, would probably be brought up for assault; and, notwithstanding the moral certainty of his convictions, what reason or justification could he offer in any court of law? Should he speak to his wife's aunt? Where would be the use? She would, doubtless, deny any such knowledge, and give him some plausible and garbled explanation of the torn note, which he believed was in her handwriting; besides, he had no great liking for the old lady, and shrank from her intermeddling in his affairs. Should he speak to his wife, and demand an explanation?'

This appeared to him by far the best. Yet when he came to think the subject over a little more calmly, he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that he had but little to

produce in evidence to so grave a charge, —scarcely anything but this torn piece of paper; and if a woman was intent upon deceiving her husband, would she scruple to tell a falsehood to further her design.

At last, after much debating with himself, he resolved to wait for a time, and to watch Mrs. Hornby narrowly, and, if his suspicions were confirmed, then he would demand an explanation.

When Mrs. Hornby, who for a short time had been absent, returned, she found her husband to all appearance calmly reading, and, in answer to his question, 'Where she had been?' replied, she had been shopping, and had called at her aunt's. As Mr. Hornby offered no further remark, Mrs. Hornby left the room to remove her bonnet, while her husband's countenance contracted a frown as he reflected that she had either gone to her aunt's for the purpose of meeting this former lover of hers, or that it was there she received his letters.

Soon Clara Hornby noticed her husband's increased coldness of manner towards her; but she did not now, as she would once have done, inquire into its cause. She also felt that Mr. Hornby was often watching her, and this seemed to cause her some uneasiness. If

she ever encountered his eyes fixed upon her with what appeared some scrutiny, she would change colour, be slightly confused, and sometimes leave the room abruptly; and if any one had accompanied Mrs. Hornby to her room on these occasions, they would have seen that she often wept; but always before descending again to her husband she made a careful scrutiny of herself in the glass, doubtless to see that no traces of the tears she had been shedding would be likely to betray her. At last things appeared to be coming to a crisis, for Mr. Hornby, arriving home rather unexpectedly one day, encountered a gentleman just leaving his house, and, on inquiring of the servant who it was,—for the visitor in question was a total stranger to Mr. Hornby,—was informed that it was a Mr. Vincent. Mr. Hornby felt as if he would rather have been shot than have heard this confirmation of his wife's guilt. As soon as he beheld her he said,—

‘So, madam, your secret is out now! Fool that I have been to be so duped! but it is over now.’

‘Oh, Arthur!’ Mrs. Hornby interrupted, ‘I am even glad that you know it. It has been such a burden to me.’

‘Good heavens! can you stand there and

make this shameless avowal to me?' cried Mr. Hornby, excitedly.

'I do feel shame at having deceived you. I acknowledge I ought to have told you before our marriage,' replied Mrs. Hornby, her tears beginning to fall.

'I wish you had; it would have saved us both much unhappiness.'

'Oh, Arthur! will you not forgive me?' she sobbed.

'Never! It is impossible. I am astonished you can ask it; indeed, after your recent conduct, I beg to tell you that the same roof will not shelter us.'

At this announcement Mrs. Hornby uttered a slight scream, and then continued to weep most bitterly.

'No,' said Mr. Hornby, after a moment's pause,—'No; your tears will not move me to alter my resolution, that the same house shall no longer contain us. I have no objection to make you a suitable allowance, so long as you choose to live respectably;'—then, with a sneer—'so long as you do not seek the protection of Mr. Frank Vincent.'

No electric shock could have produced a more sudden and complete change in Mrs. Hornby, than did these last words of her

husband ; her tears became suddenly dried, and she rose up quickly, looking angry and commanding. Then she said, 'Never did I think I should live to be thus insulted. If you can think thus meanly of me—if you can act thus cruelly, it is indeed time we did part. Perhaps the time may come when you will bitterly repent your conduct ; but, remember, that repentance sometimes comes too late.' With these words, she swept proudly from the room.

The minutes passed on—an hour passed on—still Mr. Hornby sat in the room where Clara had left him. Another half-hour passed on, and then he was roused by the servant announcing dinner. Then, like one in a dream, he followed the servant to the dining-room, and, on being asked whether Mrs. Hornby should not be summoned, managed to murmur something about her not being well ; then he mechanically sat down, and partook of whatever was set before him.

When the repast was concluded, he went back to the room he had previously quitted. It was still empty. Mrs. Hornby evidently meant to take him at his word, and leave the house immediately ; perhaps she had gone already. Soon he felt impelled to go and see. He looked in one or two rooms,

she was not there ; then he ascended to her chamber, and attempted to open the door. It was locked ; probably she was making her preparations to leave. Mr. Hornby did not inquire, he merely went downstairs again. He took up a book and tried to read ; but the words seemed to have no meaning to him. He then took up a pen and endeavoured to write ; but the only words he found himself tracing were, ' Perhaps your repentance may come too late.' Then the pen dropped from his fingers, and he fell again into a sort of reverie. In it he seemed to review every word and circumstance in connection with his wife's conduct, and her last words, coupled with her manner, were not without some effect. Had he flung away his happiness on a mere jealous suspicion ? Had he been too hasty in judging from appearances ? Too harsh in condemning his wife almost unheard ? Was there any hope that matters might yet be explained satisfactorily ? and if so, was he so proud that he would fling away that hope ? Long was the struggle ; but at length Arthur Hornby's better nature triumphed, and he felt as if he must make one last attempt to learn the actual truth—make one final, almost despairing, effort to regain his lost happiness.

Again he ascended the stairs, again tried the door—it was still locked. What was Mrs. Hornby doing? Was she writing to Frank Vincent? Was she making preparations to return to her aunt? Had she already gone, locking the door on the outside to deceive the servants for a time? All these ideas passed through Mr. Hornby's mind in much less time than it takes to relate them. Then he seemed to hear a strange, low sort of moaning, and in an instant he remembered her last words, 'Repentance sometimes comes too late.' Good heavens! was she attempting to destroy herself? Was that her meaning? Had his conduct driven her to some rash act?

At this last thought Mr. Hornby hastily broke open the door and entered the room. As he did so, what sight was it that met his eyes that seemed for the moment to render him spell-bound?

Was the last terrible thought that had entered his mind realised? No; for as he entered the room his wife uttered a kind of half-shriek, half-moan. Why did he quickly seize and half-drag her into an adjoining dressing-room, and then quickly close the door and lock it?

Had he seen anything in that one rapid glance to confirm his suspicions, or was there something worse about to happen?

What really occurred in that room at this period can only be gathered from subsequent consequences. After all, it could not have been anything of a tragic nature; for if any one had listened at the door about half-an-hour afterwards, they would have heard sounds of laughter, and when Mr. and Mrs. Hornby emerged from the room, they not only seemed to have come to a complete understanding, but both looked as happy—and Clara even more so—than in the earliest days of their honeymoon, and Mr. Hornby was now saying,—

‘So this Mr. Vincent is not, after all, the person I imagined, but only the rich cousin of poor Mr. Frank Vincent, whom you refused for the sake of becoming the wealthy Mrs. Hornby?’ and here he looked at his wife with a sly and merry twinkle in his eye.

Clara blushed and replied,—

‘Whom Mrs. Hornby refused, sir, before she ever thought you would honour her with the title of wife.’

‘And this Mr. Vincent—I don’t mean Frank, but his cousin—only called that once to inform you that your aunt was about to leave home on business so suddenly, that not having time to write, she had requested him to call and acquaint you with the reason of her absence?’

‘All that is perfectly true,’ answered Clara. ‘Still I am not surprised that you should have made a mistake with regard to the two Mr. Vincents, or that my foolish conduct led you to suppose there was something wrong. Then, too, it was perfectly natural you should imagine that the torn letter, which you found in my work-basket, had reference to Frank Vincent, instead of being an old letter my aunt wrote to me while staying with some friends, soon after our return from Paris.’

‘Well, you must allow,’ returned Mr. Hornby, ‘that from the name being the same, I really had grounds for some slight suspicion.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Hornby gaily, ‘and yet I cannot help laughing at your thinking the name of a French hairdresser related to Mr. Frank Vincent,’ and a peal of merry laughter rang through the room, in which Mr. Hornby joined. When their hilarity became a little more moderated, Arthur Hornby said,—

‘It seems to me that I have been making an ass of myself, and conjuring up evils that had no existence.’

‘Yes;’ replied his wife, ‘you have been making mountains out of mole-hills.’

‘While you,’ responded her husband, ‘have been conjuring up troubles out of *thin air*,’ and Mr. Hornby gave his wife an arch look

as he pronounced the last *two words* with singular emphasis ; and this last speech seemed to provoke their mirth again. We think the reader will now begin to guess the nature of the secret Clara Hornby had guarded from her husband, and which caused her formerly to shrink from his caresses—to lock herself in her room—and to appear at times grave and depressed, and which had, in fact, been the innocent cause of all Mr. Hornby's suspicions, and of his wife's unhappiness. But lest there should be any doubt on the subject, we now say out honestly that the secret was that Clara Hornby's beautiful wavy brown hair was—a wig !

It now only remains to be said that Mr. Hornby, having discovered the secret, which was the first and last the husband and wife had between them, their future married life proved a very happy one, and that Mrs. Hornby, with her husband's consent, still kept from the knowledge of the world what had once been to her such a terrible secret.





THE STORY OF AN OLD HOUSE.

RELATED BY ITSELF.



YES, I am an old house now, not worth much, I dare say, to anybody; though, if I were wanted, I might perhaps last a little longer, notwithstanding I am a hundred years old—a hundred years old—Heigho! I did not think I should last so long when I was built. Yet it seems a little while to look back upon, and I confess I am sorry that a railway, lately projected, will now put an end to my existence.

Before I totally disappear, I should like to relate about some of the people who have dwelt within my precincts, and the events that occurred under my sheltering roof; for these

old walls have witnessed scenes both grave and gay, both sorrowful and happy, and the former, as, alas ! is too often the case in life, the former more than the latter. For, gentle reader, though I have witnessed a good many changes in my time, yet I find human nature is much the same ; people love and hate ; quarrel and make it up ; are happy and sad ; successful or despairing just the same now as they were a hundred years ago—as I imagine they were in the days of the Patriarchs.

Ah ! we may have railways to enable us to glide along easily on our travels, but there is no invention for making the journey of life any smoother than it was of yore. We may have our printing presses, our telegraphs, and our steam-power, but there is no press that ever I heard of for pressing consistency and straightforwardness into people, or the selfishness out of them ; there is no electrical machine for rousing the soft answer that turneth away wrath—there is no power invented that makes people truer, kinder, more just than formerly. Not that I wish to imply there is little good in mankind—far from it—I think there is often more good than is seen or given credit for by the world. Many a noble thought that never finds utterance.

Many a kind and fitting word that is only known by the one to whom it is spoken. Many a good and charitable deed that passes unnoticed. No, believe me, I only wish to give a gentle reminder that in all ages human nature is much the same, and for that reason the lives of those who existed a hundred, or even hundreds of years ago, interest us as much as those who have lived, or are living in our own day.

But I must not go musing on in this way, or I shall never tell my story. However, it is the way of old age to be garrulous, so I trust I may be excused.

It was in the year 17— that I first began my existence ; even then, it was some time before I was completely finished, for the man who built me was fond of what he called ‘speculating,’ but what I should more properly term ‘gambling,’ so that he sometimes had a good deal of money, and sometimes none at all ; but of all the money that passed through his hands, I never could hear that he had done any good with it, except, perhaps, build me, and I remained to him when nothing else was left.

As I have already remarked, I was some time in building, for he only attended to me by fits and starts, when he was what he termed ‘flush of cash ;’ however, at last,

I was finished, and called 'Bradbury House'—Bradbury being the name of my owner; and I must give him credit to say that he built me substantially, for houses were not knocked up in the quick and ginger-bread style that they are in these days. I laugh till my old timbers creak again to see the houses opposite me now—poor, miserably-built things, that only stand by propping each other up; they could never brave the storms and blasts alone, as I have done, and are little likely to last a hundred years. Well, perhaps, they are not wanted to last, for people now-a-days require the latest fashion in houses, as well as in dresses. However, as I said I was finished a good, substantial, square-built house, roomy and comfortable, with a large garden, enclosed in four walls, part of this wall sheltering me from the high-road in which I stood. Although situated in a main thoroughfare, the place was so pleasant and quiet, and contained so few houses, that I was looked upon as a country residence. Now, I am in the midst of a populous neighbourhood, containing numerous shops, as well as private houses.

When I had been built nearly four years, Mr. Bradbury proved so unfortunate in his speculations that he was compelled to put

me up for sale, and I was at length purchased by a lawyer of the name of Oldham. He was a gaunt, hard man; but, notwithstanding he appeared always shabbily dressed, yet, I believe, he was rich—at all events he was reputed to be such—and his miserly habits probably tended to strengthen this opinion. He was much too parsimonious to make me his abode, having rather purchased me as a good investment of some of his money, and with the idea that I should produce a good interest for his outlay, in the shape of rent. So a large board was stuck up in front of me, with the information to all whom it might concern, that I was 'To Let,' and then followed a list of the advantages I possessed, concluding with a reference to 'J. Oldham, Solicitor, Old Jewry,' for Mr. Oldham declared he would have no agents meddling in his business, and wanting no end of commission and fees.

There were soon plenty of persons to view the 'Eligible and commodious house,' as I was called, but whether I did not exactly suit their requirements, or whether they did not like the prospect of Mr. Oldham as a landlord, or that he wanted too much rent, certain it was that some time elapsed before any one was found to take me.

One day, however, two ladies and a gentleman came and inspected me. The ladies were mother and daughter, and the latter was engaged to be married to the gentleman, who, I ought to have said, had paid me a previous visit.

The elder lady was pleasant-looking ; but there was something very winning and attractive about the younger, who was constantly addressed as Lena, and it was not to be wondered at that, under existing circumstances, the gentleman, whose name was Arthur Wilton, should look at her more than the house, as she flitted gaily from room to room, saying, in her pleasant girlish voice, what a charming sitting-room this would make ; how snug that would be for a library ; what a nice bedroom this would be, and how the smaller one near it, should be for her very own use ; for, reader, such things as boudoirs were not commonly known in those days. Thus gay, happy Lena planned on, and mother and future husband seemed well pleased she should arrange all to her own liking.

A short time after, Mr. Wilton came again alone, and from the observations he made had evidently decided on taking me. Then what a number of pretty new things in the way of furniture came to beautify me and make me a home.

Mr. Wilton was evidently well off. I fancy he was something in the shipping line, and he seemed to spare no expense in fitting me up. He was constantly coming to superintend everything, and once or twice the elder lady came again; but never Lena. She was not to see me until I was completed.

At length all was finished; servants were installed, and then all was left undisturbed for some days. Then they came—Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, I mean, for Lena was married now. How astonished and delighted she was with the way the house had been fitted up!

How well I remember her saying, when they returned to the library, after inspecting the house,—

‘Oh, Arthur! how very kind of you to plan all this for me;’ and glancing round the well-appointed room, ‘you seem to have anticipated my every wish. There seem so many beautiful things, I do not know which to admire most.’

And he replied, in a deep, manly tone, placing his arm tenderly around her,—

‘My darling, you are the most beautiful thing to me.’

Truly Arthur and Lena, or Helena Wilton, were a handsome, loving couple, and time

seemed rather to strengthen than decrease their attachment to each other.

As time went on, a baby's gentle cooing was heard within my walls. I need not dwell on the pleasure of the parents at this, their first child, nor the delight of the grandmother, though she did not long survive its birth, and her death cast, for some time, a shadow over the young mother's bright face. The years sped on in that pleasant monotony which constitutes the happiness of so many lives, and there was now a young family of Wiltons growing up; yet Lena looked still young, for she was but nineteen when she married—and hers had been a happy life. Her husband, too, looked well, though he had a thread or two of grey in his hair, for he was fifteen years older than his wife—a fact which she was rather disposed to regret.

Well, as I said, they had passed a good many years very peacefully and happily beneath my roof, their trials and vexations—from which no life is free—being evanescent ones, when a relation of Mr. Wilton's died and left him all his property, some kind of small estate I think, it was, and thither the Wilton family soon removed. Not without regrets though, at leaving me; indeed, I believe Lena shed a

few tears when they took their final departure from Bradbury House.

I was now again to let, but did not remain vacant long, being taken by a brewer and his family, of whom I remember little, so I suppose they were only ordinary kind of people. After they left, I was inhabited by a widow and her son. Mrs. Mordaunt, that was the widow's name, rather remonstrated on taking so large a house, but Edgar Mordaunt was so pleased with the garden and the situation, that he persuaded his mother to take the house, and the widow, whose only fault seemed to be a too great indulgence of her son Edgar, acceded to his request.

Perhaps there was an excuse for her indulgence, for her son was very handsome and clever ; he was, moreover, good-tempered, and affectionate towards her ; but, on the other hand, he was extravagant, selfish, and inclined to be rather wild ; his principles were not at all decided ; indeed, he seemed to act more from impulse, either for bad or for good, than from any fixed principle, and when his temper was roused, he could be rather violent. It certainly trembled in the balance whether in the future Edgar Mordaunt would make a good or a bad man, a mediocre one I do not believe he could be, for then he was barely one-and-twenty.

Often would his mother sit pondering over his future, and he left her plenty of time to ponder, for he was much away. Evening after evening would he join his gay companions in some scheme of amusement, while his poor mother was left to pass the hours alone, and once I heard her exclaim,—

‘Oh, if I only had a daughter, I should not be left so much alone!’

Yet she seldom offered more than a gentle remonstrance to her son on his irregular habits, and this was always met by the answer, that he only did as other young men, and that he could not be expected to stay at home for ever. With the exception of a Sunday occasionally, it was little his home saw of him, and there were constantly such scenes as the following :—

‘Edgar, dear, you are very late. I wish you would try and come home a little earlier.’

‘Well, mother, I confess it is rather late’ (it was often between two and three in the morning); ‘but, then, why do you persist in sitting up for me? Why cannot one of the servants do as well?’

‘No, Edgar; you know, even if I go to bed, I cannot sleep, and the time then seems longer than remaining up for you.’

‘Then, if you would rather sit up, why do you blame me for keeping you up?’ he would

return, with a gay laugh ; and then would continue in a coaxing tone,—

‘ I am sure, mother, dear, you would not wish to curtail a fellow’s enjoyment. You know it is said, youth is the time to enjoy everything.’

‘ Yes, but it is also the time for work. A youth frittered away will never bring a calm and peaceful old age.’

‘ Well, I’ll leave the old age to take care of itself, and will now bid you good-night. You shall preach to me another time ;’ and, kissing his mother’s pale and wearied face, Edgar would retire to his room.

When people retire to their rooms there is an end of them, not only to the world, but to their most intimate friends. Only *I* know what takes place then. Only *I* witnessed the tears of that mother, and heard her frequent prayers in her son’s behalf.

Only I saw how, when the young man had closed his door, a gloom would often settle down on his handsome face, and he would mutter,—‘ Confound it, what a deal of money I have lost to Howard,’ or Clifton, or who ever might be his boon companion of the hour. ‘ I must get some more money from my mother. What shall I say to her ? Not the truth, that’s certain ;’ and then the young

fellow would knit his brows, and think what story he could invent to deceive his mother. How would all this end? Not well, you may be sure; but what the final career of Edgar Mordaunt was I am unable to tell. Whether he fell in with good advisers—saw the error of his ways and reformed—or whether he sank deeper and deeper into that vortex into which he seemed already to have plunged; for Mrs. Mordaunt became ill. A cold, caught, I believe, in sitting up for her son, settled upon her lungs, and in a comparatively short time caused her death.

Many and bitter were now the son's tears and self-reproaches that he had not endeavoured to render that mother's life happier, and more than once he reiterated the resolve to pursue a different course; but, alas! he was such an impulsive being that it is impossible to judge whether he had strength to carry out his good resolutions, or whether, as time softened his grief and tended to efface the impression made by his mother's death, he did not again fall back into his old habits,—for talents and brilliant accomplishments, unless controlled by good principles, are almost sure to be a snare to their possessor, and to cause his ultimate ruin. But to continue my story, and I now come to a dark episode in my narration.

After the death of his mother, Edgar Mor-daunt left Bradbury House.

The next tenant was a Mr. Dunlop. He had a wife and four grown-up daughters, all of whom were very extravagant, and fond of show and company.

I never learnt exactly what Mr. Dunlop was, but I am tolerably certain that the house and his style of living were more than his income could support, and it was a curious mixture to see wife and daughters clothed in the most expensive dresses, dashing about in a carriage, and giving fine parties, while the trades-people asked in vain for their money, and servants were importunate for their wages.

How people can find pleasure in this sort of life, the old house cannot understand ; but as there are houses which, instead of being like myself, plain brick and stone, are be-dizened all over with a lot of stucco ornaments, which look very showy for the time, but won't last ; so there seem to be persons who like this stucco manner of living, and who, when they fall to pieces in one place, manage to plaster themselves up in another, caring nothing about a solid foundation, or a good interior, so long as they can present a grand appearance to the world. Here I

am moralising again, instead of going on with my story.

To return to Mr. Dunlop. His expenditure, as I have said, outran his income, and to make up some of the deficiency he systematically abstracted sums of money that did not belong to him; and many a night have I beheld him, when the household had retired, falsifying the accounts, so that his defalcations might not be discovered. How wild he would look at these times, and how often his eyes would gaze restlessly around, as though he dreaded, in spite of his precaution, to see another's eyes fixed on his criminal deed.

For dress, and house, and society, was it worth wrecking peace of mind and conscience, and perilling a soul? But Gordon Dunlop did not think thus, or put it in this way, when he committed his first deviation from the right path; on the contrary, he shut his eyes to the real heinousness of what he was doing, and glossed it over with a fine name, as in these transactions men invariably do, and, having once committed a false step, and finding it had escaped detection, he persisted in its continuance.

Things went on for a time—the dressing and extravagance, the dinner parties and

evening parties. What sumptuous entertainments! What brilliant gatherings the old house witnessed in those days; yet, with the exception of Mr. Dunlop, I alone knew how hollow it all was—what a terrible sham was presented to the world!

At the last entertainment given—perhaps the most brilliant of all—I alone witnessed the terrible expression on his face when he was in his own room, and knew from his clenched fists and muttered imprecations and exclamations of horror that the *dénouement* was at hand.

Yes, Gordon Dunlop was on the brink of public exposure. Another day, and all would be known to the world.

How little any of that brilliant assembly dreamt that a prison was yawning for the gentlemanlike Gordon Dunlop—for the master of that handsome house and appurtenances, who, however, appeared restless, irritable, and excited all that evening.

The guests were gone, the lights extinguished, and Mrs. Dunlop and her daughters were having a few final words before separating for the night, speaking, perhaps, all the freer for the absence of Mr. Dunlop, who had unaccountably disappeared before the guests had taken their departure.

At last Mrs. Dunlop said,—

‘Where’s your father? Has he gone to bed? For I do not think he felt well this evening.’

‘I do not know, mamma,’ returned her eldest daughter.

Suddenly there was a loud noise—the report of a pistol. The ladies looked at each other in a sudden terror, then Mrs. Dunlop, remembering the quantity of plate about, exclaimed,—

‘Thieves have got into the house! Where are the servants? Help!’ she screamed.

‘Thieves!’ echoed the daughters.

The servants—roused by the noise and screams—were by this time all around their mistress inquiring what was the matter, when the second daughter, who seemed the only one who retained sufficient calmness to explain, replied, that they believed thieves were in the house, as they had heard a dreadful noise upstairs.

Thither they all at once proceeded. No glimmer of the actual truth even for an instant crossing their minds as they ascended to the room from whence the noise had appeared to proceed; the door was locked, but it was soon forced open, and then—then there issued a frightful shriek, and Mrs. Dunlop fainted, for the husband and father was lying dead on the floor, with

the pistol beside him with which he had shot himself.

Yes, I had witnessed the last struggles of the miserable man; had seen how his feelings had goaded him almost to the verge of madness; had heard the wild ravings which he uttered when he withdrew from the company,—what a contrast to the careless tones and light laughter going on downstairs; had heard his resolve taken that he would end his life sooner than face the shame and disgrace of the morrow; had seen him examine the pistol, which he had brought home that very day; adjust it carefully, just as the last guest was departing; then a pause—then a wild cry! Was it for mercy? and then the pistol fired, and the sudden fall to the ground of Gordon Dunlop, who, unable to face the consequences of his own fatal deed, had taken his life with his own rash hand.

I pass over the terrible confusion of that night, and the inquest and funeral that followed, and will only mention that the grief of Mrs. Dunlop's family at his loss seemed almost swallowed up in the dreadful explanation of the cause of his death, and in what followed.

The house was now the scene of unfor-

fortunate creditors ; then of brokers. All for which Mr. Dunlop had sacrificed himself was scattered far and wide, while his conduct was universally condemned. The wife and daughters went to some distant part of the country—being offered a home by some poor relation whom they had hitherto despised ; and I was again left solitary, with bare walls.

I was empty a good while. After the sad occurrence of Mr. Dunlop's death, nobody seemed inclined to come and dwell at Bradbury House.

When I had been to let nearly a twelvemonth, my owner, Mr. Oldham, died, and I came into the possession of his nephew, Frederick Oldham, who was about as opposite to his uncle as could well be imagined. Whereas, Mr. Oldham had been thin and shabby, sour-visaged and saving, Mr. Frederick Oldham was stout, and always remarkably well dressed, jovial in manner, and as to saving, he never once seemed to think of it—spending was more to his taste. Finding I did not let, he tried living in me himself ; but, somehow or other, I did not seem to suit him ; he grumbled that 'the place gave him the horrors ;' that it was 'too far from town ;' that 'the place was damp ;' and,

finally, 'that it was too slow for him.' So he left, and soon after, by offering the place at a lower rent, he managed to let it.

The people who then came to reside at Bradbury House were very different to any who had previously occupied or owned it, being a vulgar, noisy family, consisting of a Mr. Newman, who was a coach-builder, and a widower, three sons, one a young man, the other two growing lads, at whom the three sisters seemed always shouting; Dick and 'Arry, as they were called, being always up to some tricks when at home. As to Tom, the eldest son, he seemed overwhelmed with conceit, dressed in a showy manner, and thought he played the great man by imitating the vices of those who were above him in social position. He was what may simply be described as a detestable young man; his father, notwithstanding his even greater coarseness and vulgarity, was preferable of the two, for he at least was without any pretence of being grander than he really was.

Then the three daughters, who rejoiced in the names of Liza, Tilda, and Emma, although not quite so conceited as their eldest brother, had yet sufficient of that commodity to make them imagine they were all remarkably pretty girls, and distinguished-looking, too, when the

truth was, they were about as ordinary-looking a set of girls as you could well meet.

How different to the charming, graceful Lena Wilton, who was the first lady occupant of the old house. Truly I felt, with this vulgar family dwelling within my walls, as if I had come down in the world,—as if I were grown vulgar too.

How I hated the flaring green blinds and the bright yellow curtains with which they thought fit to adorn me, the odious patterned carpets, the ill-assorted furniture, which looked as if it had been bought piecemeal at a broker's shop—perhaps it had—and also the trumpery stuff they called 'ornaments,' but which I considered trash.

How different all this was to the taste, and even splendour, with which I had been previously furnished; for, reader, in spite of parsimoniousness, extravagance, irregular habits, and even crime, all my previous owners and occupants had been gentlefolks. Even Mr. Dunlop, in spite of his terrible career and ending, had been a man of gentlemanlike bearing and deportment, and in conversation and manner could have been admitted into any society, and had, in fact, been much sought after. Mr. Newman and his family, on the contrary, were shunned by nearly all

who resided in the neighbourhood, and consequently they had to fall back on their own set for what society they required; and it rather vexed them that, coming to live at Bradbury House, had not tended to raise them in the social scale, they having previously resided at their father's place of business.

Tom was now with his father; the two younger lads were still at school; Miss 'Liza superintended the household, and prided herself much on her management, which appeared chiefly to consist in finding fault with everything and everybody; also on her culinary and needlework accomplishments, which were certainly rather good. Miss Tilda, on the contrary, went in for being a literary lady, read a very few books, wrote silly verses, which she called 'poems;' did what she called 'her painting,' which consisted of the most wretched daubs; and played a little on an old spinnet in a manner that would have sent any musician or composer crazy. With these accomplishments she was considered the clever one of the family, and was looked up to as such. Miss Emma occupied herself with a little of both sisters' occupations, but did not go in thoroughly for either. She set herself up for being a beauty, and therefore never did anything that she thought was likely to injure

her complexion or her figure, and a good deal of her time was taken up with the duties of the toilet, and what she termed, though only to herself, 'setting off her natural charms to the best advantage.'

I will not weary my readers with the vulgar sayings and doings of this family, or with the revellings that took place occasionally while they dwelt within my walls ; parties, as they called them—but which no more resembled those given by my previous occupants than I, Bradbury House, resembled a labourer's cottage. I only propose making one or two remarks on the last affair of this kind given by the Newman family, because it led to their final dispersion, and to my being once again empty.

During the evening of which I speak, Miss Emma, the youngest daughter, and a Mr. Alfred Dent seemed to get on remarkably good terms with each other ; indeed, I witnessed two or three tender passages between them, and actually saw a kiss stolen, and heard Miss Emma exclaim, 'For shame !' but I don't believe she minded it for all that. Also, and this, perhaps, was of more consequence—Mr. Newman's behaviour to his servant, Hannah Smith, seemed to strike one or two persons as rather peculiar. She (Hannah) was almost constantly in the room where the

festivities were going on, and Mr. Newman's attention seemed to be frequently turned towards her, and he appeared very often to speak to and consult her in a way that no man—and more especially one who is a bachelor or a widower—should ever do.

Amongst those who remarked Mr. Newman's behaviour that night, and whose suspicions were thereby aroused, was his eldest daughter; and Miss Newman determined to speak to her father the next day, and to discharge Hannah immediately.

On the following morning she carried out her resolve, and, having secured her father and herself from interruption, she declared her intention of dismissing Hannah after her behaviour of the previous evening, and hinted that her father ought really to be more careful in his conduct towards their domestics.

Whereupon Mr. Newman flew into a rage and demanded, 'Whether he was master in his own household, and whether he had not a right to treat everybody in it just as he pleased?' and then continued, 'his daughter might dismiss Hannah if she liked, but that the said Hannah would shortly return to be mistress of this house.'

'Mistress of this house!' gasped poor Miss Liza.

‘Yes; my lawful wedded wife. Don’t you understand that, you little gaping fool.’

Be it understood that Miss Newman was above the ordinary height, and was certainly no fool; but her father cared little what he said in his anger, for he knew he was acting in defiance of his children’s interest and wishes; and his daughter appeared so astonished at his announcement, that it deprived her for the instant of the sense she usually possessed. With a sort of effort she seemed to gather her bewildered faculties together, and to take in the import of her father’s words; then her wrath was aroused, and in loud and rapid tones she replied,—‘That she never could have believed her father would have acted in such a way,—that she couldn’t; that it was all through that hussy in the kitchen; but that she should go that very day,—that she should; and, if her father persisted in his infatuation, he need not any longer count on the society of his daughters, for she did not believe her sisters would, and, certainly, she should not remain after the event had taken place, to which he had just alluded.’ And then Miss ’Liza sailed out of the room, with as much offended dignity as she could assume. She then made her father’s communication known to her sisters, whose surprise and in-

dignation were only second to her own. Miss 'Liza now took up a newspaper and scanned the advertisements, saying she intended to look out for a good and suitable situation as housekeeper to a gentleman. Miss Tilda remarked with a sigh, that she supposed there was nothing else to be done but to become a governess; and then both sisters inquired,—

‘And what do you mean to do, Emma?’

‘I don’t know,’ returned the supposed beauty. ‘Get married, perhaps.’

‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ replied Miss Tilda, a little sharply, while ‘Liza added sternly,—

‘I’m surprised at you, Emma, that you can jest at such a time as this. Who is there, I should like to know, that you can marry?’

Miss Emma gave no reply, but pouted, and shed a few—a very few tears.

It all came about as had been previously planned. The domestic quitted Bradbury House for a few weeks, and then returned as its mistress. Then Miss ‘Liza left for the situation she had obtained as housekeeper to a widower with two children—perhaps she married him in the long run. It would not be her fault if she did not. Miss Tilda, much to her disgust, could only obtain a situation as nursery governess. I believe—

indeed, I know—that she would rather, at the last, have remained in her father's house, if she had not been kept up to her determination by her eldest sister. As to Miss Emma, she eloped with her lover, Mr. Alfred Dent, already mentioned ; for, as she afterwards remarked, what could she do but get married. I hope her marriage turned out tolerably well, for, as a rule, I don't think runaway matches do turn out well, and Miss Emma, despite her vanity, certainly deserved the best fate of the three sisters, for she had a better heart than either of the others.

The eldest son, Tom, was at this period taken into the business of an uncle, who resided in the country, so he left home for good ; the two younger lads were sent to school, and Mr. and Mrs. Newman being now alone, the former judged it better to remove to some other neighbourhood, where his wife's antecedents were not so generally known ; consequently, they left soon after they were married. And it is now time I turned my attention to the persons who next occupied Bradbury House.

I had been so much injured by the Newmans, that it was necessary to put me in repair previous to the fresh arrivals, and for many weeks I was occupied by work-people.

At the end of that time, I felt as if I were once more restored to my former appearance, and could hold my own against the few new houses which were already beginning to spring up.

The new inmates now arrived. They consisted of two maiden ladies of the name of Walford, and their niece Ellen; and being quiet, lady-like people, they were soon visited by most of the best persons in the neighbourhood.

Ellen Walford was about twenty when she and her aunts took up their abode within my walls; but, from her straight and regular features, pale complexion, and dark hair and eyes, coupled with rather a staid demeanour, she appeared older, yet she was always cheerful and happy, and seemed much attached to her aunts.

It seemed strange that they should often sigh and shake their heads when alone, and Miss Walford would murmur, 'Poor thing! Ah! it is best she does not know all. No use in casting any shadow on her young life—she will know sorrow and trial soon enough. Don't you agree with me, Maria?' And the younger sister would reply, 'I don't disagree with your last remark, Priscilla, still I think it would have been better if Ellen had known

the truth from a child. If it were to do over again, I would have no mystery about it.'

There was, then, some mystery—something concealed in relation to Ellen Walford, the nature of which I heard in time, and which shall be explained to the reader. The truth was, that Ellen was only the illegitimate daughter of Miss Walford's only brother. He had led a very wild career, and met with an early death. In his dying moments his mind seemed troubled by the remembrance of one Lucy Field, whom he had betrayed, and he implored his sisters with his dying breath, 'to do something for poor Lucy and her child.'

The sisters, in compliance with this request, had then seen the mother and Ellen, who was then very young; the Miss Walfords were so taken with the latter, that they agreed to adopt her, and bring her up as their own niece; while, by their recommendation, some suitable employment was found for Lucy Field, who, although occupying a position much inferior to the Walfords, had come of respectable parentage, and who, with the exception of her one grave fault of loving Edward Walford, 'not wisely but too well,' seemed to be a quiet, well-conducted girl.

She did not live a great while to trouble

the Miss Walfords, and on her death the eldest sister had suggested that Ellen's origin should be buried in oblivion, and that she should be brought up in ignorance of who her mother really was.

To this, as we have seen, Miss Maria had consented, yet not without some demur at first ; for, although the younger of the two, Miss Maria ruled in everything, being of an energetic character ; and, in any matter of moment, gentle, placid Miss Priscilla Walford always asked the advice of her sister, and was generally guided by her.

When they had been more than two years at Bradbury House, a young man of the name of Mortimer began to be a visitor there, and it was soon evident that Ellen was the attraction that drew his steps, on one excuse or another, so often in that direction.

The reason of his frequent visits soon became apparent to the Miss Walfords, and they began to feel tolerably sure that Mr. Mortimer would soon ask their permission to become the engaged lover of Ellen.

But, although Henry Mortimer was in every respect such a man as they would have selected, yet the anticipation of his coming proposal seemed to give pain rather than

pleasure to the two sisters, for they now felt that their secret must be disclosed—at least Miss Maria felt so—for Miss Priscilla had begged her sister that it might still be concealed; but Miss Maria was firm, and replied,—‘She would have no man marrying the girl under false pretences, and, as a preliminary, Ellen must now be told.’ So Miss Walford said no more, but only sighed, though she grieved much that ‘Maria would persist in telling all.’

I remember well that at the time when Ellen learnt the truth, she had just returned from a walk, having been to make some purchases. Her eyes looked bright, and there was a faint tinge of colour in her cheek, caused, probably, by a rather fresh breeze, and by her having hurried a little, for, as she explained, she had been unavoidably detained at one of the shops, and she concluded, almost merrily,—

‘I thought you would wonder what had become of me, but—’ then catching the grave look on Miss Walford’s face, she added quickly, ‘You have heard bad news; tell me, what is it? Is Mr. Mortimer—’ and then she stopped abruptly, and the tell-tale blush overspread her features.

‘No, dear Ellen, we have heard nothing; but we have something to tell you, neverthe-

less,' replied Miss Maria, in a kind, grave tone. 'Something that it is right you should know, though, I fear, it will give you pain.

The colour faded away from Ellen's cheeks, as she said hurriedly,—'Tell me, tell me quickly, what it is?' Then she gazed at the two sisters with a puzzled, inquiring look, ignoring the suggestion of the elder Miss Walford, that she should go and take off her bonnet before the communication was made.

Then gently and tenderly the whole truth, already told to the reader, was made known to poor Ellen, who sat like one stunned by the avowal she had just heard, and which seemed so cruelly to crush her hopes at the very moment they were on the point of fruition; for, as Ellen now confessed to the Miss Walfords, Henry Mortimer had two days previously asked her to become his wife, to which she had gladly consented, and was coming that very day to ask the consent of the two elder ladies to their union. And now, how different it would all be to what she had anticipated.

Henry could never marry her now. Poor Ellen! She looked and was very miserable. Her aunts, as they still desired she should call them, endeavoured to console her as well as they could, but were afraid to raise hopes

that were, perhaps, not destined to be realised ; and the time that intervened between the avowal of Ellen's parentage, and the arrival of Mr. Mortimer, was about as dull and miserable as any those three had passed together.

When Mr. Mortimer arrived, Miss Maria saw him alone, and immediately that he gave her the opportunity, explained everything concerning Ellen, who was sitting weeping in her own room, while Miss Priscilla, who was also alone, was inwardly praying that all might turn out better than they expected—and, reader, it did. For, at the conclusion of Miss Maria's interview with Henry Mortimer, she went and fetched Ellen, and though there were tears in her eyes, there was a cheerfulness in her tone, as she bade the former accompany her downstairs, as Mr. Mortimer particularly desired to see her ; and Ellen, still pale and trembling, followed her to the room where he was waiting, and Miss Maria, opening the door, and gently pushing Ellen in, quietly closed it, and left the lovers alone.

I shall not reveal what took place then, but leave it to be imagined by the result. For, at the end of nearly an hour, when they rejoined the Miss Walfords, Ellen's face looked flushed and happy, while Henry Mor-

timer's wore a pleased expression, from which it may be gathered that he had not regarded the communication made to him as any bar to his and Ellen's happiness.

His visits now became regular and frequent, and there was enacted again the 'old, old story' of love and courtship—old, but ever new; and it was the first time the story had been told within my walls, and, I can assure you, Bradbury House, at this period, was a very happy place indeed.

At length the marriage occurred, and a very quiet, simple wedding it was—more, perhaps, what weddings should be, than where there is so much fuss and display—and Ellen, now Mrs. Mortimer, dwelt within me no more. But I saw her and her husband two or three times after they were married, and they seemed a very attached and happy couple.

After a time, the two maiden ladies were persuaded by the young people to go and reside near them, so I lost sight of them altogether.

They were succeeded by a family consisting of a husband and wife, a son and two daughters. Ah! what different scenes were now portrayed within my walls to what had previously occurred. For Mr. Owen, a red-faced, bloated-looking man, the husband and father,

was a confirmed drunkard ; and night after night he would reel home tipsy, and then, using the most shocking oaths, would go on in the most violent manner towards his wretched, broken-hearted wife, or his poor patient daughters, who took it in turn to sit up for him.

For once, when Edmund Owen had waited up for his father, there had ensued such a violent scene, that never again would the mother permit the son to sit up for his father.

Mrs. Owen was a poor, pale, spiritless woman, she had probably loved her husband once ; but that love, in consequence of his treatment, had nearly died out, or rather it was all concentrated in her children. Her son, then aged three-and-twenty, was a good-looking, steady, manly young fellow, yet his mother often had fears lest he should ever follow his father's example, but of this there seemed little probability.

Alice and Mary Owen were two gentle, delicate-looking girls, and it seemed almost impossible that they could be the daughters of such a man as Mr. Owen, whom they rather regarded with aversion and terror, than with that love and respect that children generally feel towards their parents.

As time rolled on, Mr. Owen seemed to get worse, rather than better, and Edmund, weary of witnessing the misery at home, which he could neither prevent nor relieve, proposed to his mother that he should go abroad, saying that he considered he might then be able in time to offer a home to his mother and sisters ; and, the young man added, hesitatingly, perhaps some arrangement could be made with regard to his father.

To this Mrs. Owen replied, that it was too late now for her to think of another home, but she would be thankful to believe, in case of her death, there was a prospect of one for her daughters, and that, under all the circumstances, it was best for him to go, though it would be a terrible trial to part with him.

Soon, too soon, the mother and sisters felt, did the time arrive for Edmund Owen's departure ; even the father, who, for a wonder, was almost sober, seemed to feel a little regret that his son was going away. Mrs. Owen appeared inconsolable, and Alice and Mary had to restrain their grief, in order to restore their mother's serenity. As time went on, and they had cheering letters from him, they not only became reconciled to his absence, but even acknowledged it was best he should be away ; for Mr. Owen was going on worse

than ever, if that were possible, and it was difficult to imagine how the family would have lived at this period, if it had not been that Mrs. Owen possessed a small income of her own, which sufficed to provide all that was necessary, though it was not sufficient to afford luxuries.

And now darker days came to poor Mrs. Owen, and Bradbury House saw little at this period but scenes of suffering and sadness. For in a comparatively short period Mrs. Owen lost both her daughters. The eldest, Alice, died of consumption; she had always been very delicate, and when the fatal symptoms of the disease began to display themselves, she did not last more than a twelvemonth; and three months before her death, her sister Mary died, having taken a cold, which caused congestion of the lungs.

I pass rapidly over this period. I don't like recalling the memory of those two sad lives—lives which seem to have had so little enjoyment and happiness in them—and will rather turn to the mother, for whom more tranquil, if not happier, days were in store. When time had a little assuaged the first bitterness of her grief, Mr. Owen died; his constant habit of violent drinking having abruptly terminated his career, and his sad, patient wife was at last

free from him who had proved a hindrance instead of a help ; a curse, instead of a blessing, to her life. Her son, who had gone on prosperously, and had recently married, now wrote and entreated her to go to him, adding that it was his wife's wish, as well as his own, that she should spend the remainder of her days with them.

To this proposal Mrs. Owen gladly acceded, and, her preparations being made, and another tenant being found for me, she took her departure for the other side of the globe, where, I trust, she found that peace and happiness which had been denied her here.

The tenant who succeeded the Owens was a man about fifty-five or sixty years of age, and an old bachelor. He was very tall and rather thin, and, being a Scotchman, had high cheek-bones ; his hair and beard were grey, and his eyes had a sharp, keen look, and he spoke with a decided Scotch accent. Mr. Macpherson—that was his name—was reserved in manner, stingy in his habits, of a slightly irascible temper, and decidedly selfish. I used to hear his friends call him ‘a good fellow,’ and toast him as ‘a liberal, kind-hearted man,’ on those occasions when he entertained them ; but I can only say, Bradbury House saw little of his goodness or kind-

ness, and, as to his liberality, it seemed the great puzzle of his old housekeeper, Mrs. MacAllen, to make twopence go as far as a shilling, and to persuade her master that she did so.

As Mr. Macpherson was very regular in his habits, it began to be much noticed by this same housekeeper and the servants that he was 'very frequently from home lately,' and much speculation was entered into as to what could be the cause for this change in Mr. Macpherson's proceedings.

When the reason was announced, they were astonished ; and, if houses could feel astonishment, I am sure I should have felt it, for actually he, the old bachelor, was going to be married !

It seemed that, at one of his friend's houses, he had met a widow, of the name of Wade, and had been induced to visit her. What means she used—whether she represented a wife would be cheaper than a housekeeper, or whether she insinuated that there might be a union of incomes—I knew not ; indeed, it will ever remain a mystery to me how such a man as Mr. Macpherson could ever have married, or how any one could be found to marry him ; nevertheless, the fact occurred, and, as he went to reside at his wife's house, I was once again put up—' To Let !'

I must just mention that, during Mr. Macpherson's time, I had again changed hands, so far as my actual possessor was concerned, for Mr. Frederick Oldham (I hope the reader has not quite forgotten all about him)—Mr. Frederick Oldham had contrived so effectually to run through all his uncle's money as to be at this time very considerably in debt, and had got into the hands of the Jews; and it was to quiet one of these gentlemen in his demands for his 'interesht or his monies' that he made me over to him, and so I, Bradbury House, became the property of a little, dirty, scheming, grasping, money-making Jew of the name of Moses Abrahams, who fretted and fumed a good deal that I did not, on being vacated by Mr. Macpherson, immediately become occupied by another tenant.

At last I was taken by a gentleman and lady, who bore the name of Branscombe. I say bore the name, for I soon found out that the lady, at least, had no right to that title, not being the wife of Mr. Branscombe.

Of course, I only heard the story a little at a time, through reproaches and upbraidings, but I shall present it in a consecutive and condensed form to the reader; and it is no new tale that I am about to recount, but one, alas! which has frequently happened before.

Clara Conway—that was her name—had been married at the early age of eighteen to a Mr. Falkland, a man old enough to be her father—married to him at the wish of her parents, merely because he was rich ; and Clara, not having experienced a liking for anyone else, and being pleased, like many young girls, at the prospect of marriage, had only too easily consented to wed a man to whom she was utterly indifferent. Whether that indifference might not have ripened with time into something like love, it is impossible to say, for, unfortunately for poor Clara, William Branscombe crossed her path soon after her marriage, and, with his handsome person and fascinating manners roused the love that was lying dormant, and which ought to have been given to her husband ; while Branscombe soon became fatally interested in her.

I know not by what gradual process the guilty pair made known their preference for each other, nor how they managed to deceive the husband ; suffice it to say, that they eventually eloped to Italy—to that sunny land to which so many seem to go, who have, by their wilful acts, blotted out much, if not all, the sunshine of their lives.

They had not long returned to England when they took up their abode at Bradbury

House. I think Mr. William Branscombe had become tired of living abroad, and wished once more to mingle in the set to which he had been accustomed before knowing her who, at this period, passed as his wife, and of whom he seemed already becoming weary. Clara was now divorced from her husband, and had more than once implored Mr. Branscombe to marry her ; but this he refused to do.

As time went on, Clara was left more and more to herself, and I alone was witness of the many sad and weary hours she passed, of the reproaches she heaped on herself, of the tears she shed, and of the unutterable longing she felt that she could undo the past—that she could return to that path from which she was evermore shut out. At first she felt this loneliness was very hard to bear, and she pined much for the society of him for whom she had sacrificed all ; but eventually, when unkindness, and even harshness, succeeded to comparative indifference, Clara began to regret, not so much her hours of loneliness as the fast waning love of him for whom she had given up everything a woman holds most dear. Poor Clara ! she was reaping the bitter fruits of her sin ; and at last there occurred a terrible scene between her and Mr. Branscombe, and then they parted, to go their separate ways

in life. He, with no preparation or word of regret for his past conduct, coolly informed her that he now intended marrying a lady in a good position ; he would therefore offer Clara a certain sum of money, such as should be agreed between them, and he trusted neither to see nor be troubled with her more.

During this heartless speech from him who had once spoken in the honeyed accents of love, Clara's dark eyes were fixed upon him with a terribly wild and saddened expression. Then she made one last appeal to him not to forsake her so utterly ; then she alluded to his former attachment to her, and asked what she had done to lose it ; finally, she implored him—and here she knelt—not to do the wrong of wedding with another, but to allow their marriage to take place, adding, in the most pathetic tones, that none could ever love him better than she had done, or give greater proof of their love—for had she not forsaken all for him.

And what did William Branscombe answer to this speech ?

Why, he hissed out between his teeth—

‘That never should a degraded and divorced woman be his wife. Never—’

At these words a sudden spirit seemed roused in Clara, she sprang to her feet, and

her eyes bore a fierce expression, such as had never been seen there before. With tones of bitterness she reproached him for his unkind and unmanly conduct towards her. She entirely refused his money, or any offers of assistance, saying she would rather starve than be beholden to him for bread ; and that it might not come directly, but she was sure the day would arrive when Heaven would punish him for the manner in which he had treated her. Then Clara left him—left him for ever—for she soon after quitted the house, and I am unable to say what was her ultimate fate. I am also unable to tell whether Mr. Branscombe's intended marriage took place or not, most probably it did, and whether he ever experienced that punishment which Clara declared would be sure to overtake him. I only know he sold everything, with which I had been furnished, to a broker, and that I was once more left empty.

The next people by whom I was occupied presented a great contrast; for regularity, peace, and happiness were the order of this household.

The master of the house—the Rev. Mr. Lovejoy—was a dissenting minister, and a chapel having been built in the neighbourhood, he and his family had come to reside at Bradbury House.

During the occupancy of the last two or three tenants, the neighbourhood around me had greatly changed. What are called improvements had taken place, that is, several new roads had been made, and a number of cheap-built stucco-ornamented 'Villas,' as they are always now termed, had been erected, while some of the old-fashioned cottages had been turned into shops. Yes, the pleasant country place was growing into a regular London suburb, and though the people were more numerous, they were no longer of that aristocratic kind that had formerly dwelt here. I suffered by this change; the new people preferring the more modern and showy houses, and I consequently could no longer command the same rent as formerly, and after being vacant more than six months, and winter being at hand, Mr. Moses Abrahams was glad to let me to the dissenting minister already mentioned.

Mr. Lovejoy was a rather stout, good-tempered looking man, and his character may be shortly summed up in the words, that he was 'a Christian and a gentleman.' As he was a popular preacher and well connected, he was able to afford so large a dwelling as Bradbury House, which he required, as he had seven children—four sons and three daughters—all of whom seemed to inherit their father and

mother's happy disposition,—for Mrs. Lovejoy seemed a reflex of her husband.

How my old walls used to echo with their merry voices and cheerful laughter—for Mr. Lovejoy was not of those who think religion consists in being dull and gloomy—and he loved to promote any innocent amusement in the family; consequently there was not one, from the eldest daughter Elizabeth, who was fourteen when they first took up their abode with me, down to baby Hugh, but what loved their home, and thought it the happiest place.

The time flew quickly by with this bright, busy family—busy, not only for their own, but others' good. Ah! How many a plan have I heard discussed and known to be carried out for the welfare of others. How many a kindly deed done to their poorer neighbours. Truly the Lovejoys were a blessing to the neighbourhood, and it was a sad day when they left. So years passed on with little to remark their flight, except the growth and gradual development of the children. Then the daughter Elizabeth became engaged to a young doctor in the neighbourhood, and after another two years elapsed she was married.

What pleasure and excitement this wedding in the family seemed to produce, the only regret being that they 'should lose dear Lizzie;'

but even that was tempered by the remark that 'she would live very near them.' What a nice, suitable wedding it was—what a pretty bride this same Lizzie made; and when the time came for her departure she was embraced and wept over as if she was about to depart for ever, instead of coming as she did, when she settled down after her marriage, about once a week or once a fortnight, to her old home; when she seemed, in spite of little matronly ways, still the same cheerful, pleasant Lizzie of old. After a time a fat, chubby baby-boy accompanied her in these visits, and seemed in a fair way to be spoiled both by grandparents and uncles and aunts.

At length, when Lizzie had been married about three years, an interruption came to these frequent and pleasant visits, and I saw no more of the Lovejoys. For Mr. Lovejoy was appointed to another pastorate, and as it was a better appointment, and he had a large family dependent upon him, he felt it would be his duty to accept it, although he truly regretted leaving my neighbourhood, in which regret he was joined by all his family, particularly his eldest daughter, who felt this removal would, indeed, sever her from that constant intercourse with her relations which she had hitherto enjoyed. The neighbours,

too, and especially the poorer ones, much bewailed the loss of this good and kind family; and amidst kindly farewells, sorrow for their departure, and good wishes for their future welfare, the Lovejoys departed from Bradbury House and its neighbourhood, not without leaving behind them some traces of the good they had been able to effect.

They were succeeded by a retired tradesman and his wife; but as they had no children, and led very quiet lives, I have nothing to say about them.

After that I was vacant some time, for I was getting out of repair, and Mr. Abrahams refused to do anything to me. At length I was taken by an artist of the name of Ashburn. He was a widower, with four daughters, the eldest of whom was seventeen, and the youngest ten. I do not think Mr. Ashburn ought ever to have taken me; but he seemed a very improvident man in money matters, and his daughters were too young to assist him much in this respect. So they came—and, ah! what a different aspect I soon presented to what I had done under the rule of the Lovejoys.

Where was the cleanliness, the neatness, the comfort, if not the luxury, which had reigned under Mrs. Lovejoy's kind but firm

sway? Where was the solid respectability the old house had known in their time, and also during the stay of the immediate predecessors of the artist and his family? Gone, gone seemingly for ever!

Mr. Ashburn being an unsuccessful artist, the fortunes of the family seem to get worse, rather than improve; indeed, theirs seemed to be a downward career, and I felt as if I were gradually going down with them, for my exterior soon began to show as much signs of neglect as my interior. My garden was overgrown with weeds; the wall that enclosed me began to fall into decay, while I, myself, was both dirty and untidy; yet I contained at this period some things of value. Books, statuettes, a good piano, besides other excellent furniture, and some really good paintings, the last mentioned all by Mr. Ashburn; but the beauty of these was almost entirely lost by the want of cleanliness, order, and arrangement.

Mr. Ashburn confined himself altogether to his painting, and, for want of proper supervision, the servants did just as they liked.

The eldest daughter, Blanche, tried to bring about a better state of things; but she was too young, and too ignorant of where the wrong lay, to produce any permanent good;

and when she would sometimes betray a look of anxiety and uneasiness that she could not command a better result, her second sister, Laura, a lively girl of nearly sixteen, would tell her, 'Not to worry herself, that things would all come right in time.' But things did not come right; on the contrary, they grew worse and worse, until, at last, Mr. Ashburn was aroused to the fact that debt and ruin were staring him in the face.

Then he found fault with his daughters, for, as he said, 'allowing things to come to this pass;' rated his servants for their extravagance; the trades-people for their extortionate demands; in short, he abused everybody and everything as being the cause of his ruin, rather than himself.

One of the principal creditors was Mr. Moses Abrahams, and he did not prove a very lenient one.

Finding that Mr. Ashburn was not only behind with his rent, but greatly in debt in other ways, he took the alarm, demanded to be paid in full immediately; and this being totally out of Mr. Ashburn's power, an execution was put into the house.

It was sad to see the artist's mournful countenance as he witnessed the gradual destruction of his home. Sad to see those pretty,

and even hitherto happy, girls, looking wistfully and with tearful eyes on many a picture, ornament, or piece of furniture, connected, as it seemed to them, with happier times.

Soon the last day came ; and apparently without one friend to wish them better days, the family of the Ashburns took their sorrowful departure from Bradbury House, poorer by far than when they entered it. One can only hope that Mr. Ashburn, though a sadder, was a wiser man, and that the future of this amiable, though somewhat ill-regulated family, proved more fortunate than their career during their sojourn at Bradbury House. As for me, I was now filled for two or three days with Jews and brokers, and an idle, gaping crowd. Then the auction took place, and one by one the things formerly belonging to the Ashburns were spread far and wide. Then emptiness and silence once more prevailed within me. I was now in such a dilapidated condition, that I remained vacant for many months.

At last Mr. Abrahams secured another tenant, for he now promised that he would put me in thorough repair. This promise, however, amounted to little more than that some whitewash was put on my ceilings, one or two rooms repapered cheaply, and my

outer walls repaired. Then, after being thoroughly cleaned, my garden was put in order, and I once more began to feel and to wear a certain air of respectability.

The new tenants, who were the last occupants, were three maiden ladies of the name of Birchall; and I soon found I was to be a ladies' school, for a brass plate was fixed on my gate, bearing the inscription, 'Establishment for Young Ladies.'

Miss Joanna Birchall, the eldest, was a good-natured, stout woman, of about fifty or fifty-five, slightly lame, and this seemed to render her rather indolent. She played the part of Lady Principal, so was only seen occasionally by the pupils. By this means she kept up her dignity and apparent command, which, I am sure, would soon have given way if she had been much with the young ladies, for she was not at all clever, and her rule would certainly have been rather lax if it had not been for her sisters.

Miss Arabella, her second sister, was a complete contrast. She was much taller than Miss Birchall, and rather thin, with small, dark eyes, which, the pupils declared, 'saw everything.' She was extremely active and energetic, and not only took the entire management of the school, which was a large one, but even did

part of the actual teaching. It was Miss Arabella who was up early, and a-bed late ; who roused indolent scholars to activity, and caused active ones to be studious ; who detected any quarrels, deceit, or underhanded ways, either with pupils or teachers ; who saw the parents of the former, and engaged and dismissed the latter—in truth, Miss Arabella might be said to be the spring and main-stay of the school.

Miss Susan, the youngest, was avowedly the housekeeper ; but her duties seemed to amount to little more than issuing orders for dinners and engaging and dismissing servants, for even in this department Miss Arabella, with her energetic nature, would superintend the wants of the young ladies ; and Miss Susan was far from objecting to this. As she was several years her sister's junior, she had not yet given up all thoughts of matrimony, and, therefore, she dressed more, and went more into society, than the two elder Miss Birchalls.

What a number of different inmates my old walls sheltered during the time of these ladies' residence—for they occupied me for several years—and, indeed, have only recently left. The careless and the diligent ; the sensible and the frivolous ; the clever and the stupid ; the genius and the ordinary girl have

all, in turn, dwelt beneath my roof, and I trust have, during their sojourn, gained something which may be useful to them through life.

The years passed quietly and tranquilly by with the Miss Birchalls, and when they were compelled to quit me, by reason of the intended railway, there was little change in them, except that they looked a little older—that Miss Joanna Birchall was more indolent and easy-going than ever—that Miss Arabella was not quite so active—and that Miss Susan's visions of married life were gradually passing away.

So they, the last of my tenants, faded from my view, and I am now condemned to be pulled down, and a railway station is, I believe, to be built on my site—thus myriads of busy feet will pass over where the 'Old House' once stood.

Perhaps I ought not to mourn at this change, yet I cannot help feeling a regret that my existence is terminated; that I shall never be a home to anyone again; that never more shall my walls echo with glad, young voices, or cheerful laughter; never more afford a shelter to the sad or the unfortunate, or witness scenes of pleasure and happiness.

Already I seem to stand like a wreck of the past, with my pride and beauty all departed. Already I seem to hear the tramp of work-people, who are coming to destroy me. Soon, very soon, I shall be, like all earthly things, nothing but a heap of dust.

Well, I can but trust I have been of some use in my generation, and resign myself to my impending fate. I also hope some useful hints may be drawn from the faint sketches I have endeavoured to give of those who passed a portion of their lives beneath my roof, and that the 'Story of the Old House' has not been related entirely in vain.

THE END.

DECEMBER, 1880.

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